





*S. Chase*







THE  
DIFFICULTIES  
OF  
INFIDELITY.

---

BY GEORGE STANLEY FABER, B. D.

RECTOR OF LONG-NEWTON.

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Εστί γὰρ δόκιμον νόμισμα, καὶ ἄλλο κίβδηλον, ὅπερ οὐδὲν ἔλαττον  
πατῶ τοὺς ιδιώτας, οὐ μὴν τοὺς ἀργυρομοιβοὺς, οἱ ἴσασι μαθόντες το  
τὸ παρακεχαραγμένον καὶ τὸ δόκιμον χωρίζειν καὶ διακρίνειν.

Clem. Alex. Strom. lib. ii. p. 365.

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TO THE  
RIGHT REVEREND  
THOMAS BURGESS, D. D.

BISHOP OF ST. DAVID'S,

**This Work,**

THE SUBJECT OF WHICH WAS PROPOSED BY HIMSELF,

AND TO WHICH THE PREMIUM WAS ADJUDGED BY

THE DIOCESAN CHURCH UNION SOCIETY,

OVER WHICH HE SO WORTHILY PRESIDES,

IS MOST RESPECTFULLY

**Inscribed,**

BY HIS

OBLIGED AND OBEDIENT HUMBLE SERVANT,

THE AUTHOR.



## PREFACE.

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THE theological system of a Christian is, that *God, who, at sundry times and in divers manners, spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, and by whom also he made the worlds: who, being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the majesty on high.\**

The theological system of the infidel is, that *all religions, claiming to be revelations from heaven, are alike impostures upon the blind credulity of mankind; that the only religion, worthy of a philosophical deist, is uninspired natural religion; and that, as human reason alone is amply sufficient to guide us into all needful truth, a divine communication is no less unnecessary in the abstract, than all pretensions to such communication are false in the concrete.*

If we ask the specific ground, on which the latter system is preferred to the former; we are told, that the religion of the Bible is hampered by too many difficulties to be rationally credible: and these difficulties are forthwith produced and expatiated upon with no small degree of triumphant satisfaction.

But here a question naturally rises, whether the deistical scheme itself, in all its component parts, be free from difficulties and objections: for that which is preferred to Christianity, on the express score of the difficulties attendant upon revealed religion, ought certainly in reason to be as free as possible from all liability to the unpleasantness of a direct and well-founded retort.

In the following discussion, the question now before us is answered in the negative. Its purpose is to shew, not only that Infidelity has its own proper difficulties as well as Chris-

\* Heb. i. 1—3.

tianity, but that those difficulties are incomparably greater and more formidable: for, while the alleged difficulties attendant upon Christianity have repeatedly met with an adequate solution, though deistical writers are accustomed confidently to urge and re-urge them, without taking the slightest notice of the answers which have been so often afforded; the difficulties attendant upon Infidelity are of such a nature, that they never can be solved to the satisfaction of an unbiassed and rational inquirer. Hence results the plain and self-evident conclusion, that, *since Infidelity is encumbered by more and greater difficulties than Christianity, to adopt the infidel system evinces more credulity than to adopt the Christian system.*

The principle, in fine, of the argument, which has been prosecuted throughout the ensuing pages, is the *reductio ad absurdum*. By a specification of the immense and insuperable difficulties which on all sides beset his system, the deistical infidel, even on ground of his own selection, is convicted of gross irrationality.

August 6, 1823.

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It will be proper to state, that this work was written as a competitory Treatise on the proposition, *That there is more credulity in the disbelief of Christianity, than in the belief of it*: a proposition, which was adopted by the Church Union Society in the Diocese of St. David's, as the subject of their Essay for the year 1823.

January 20th, 1824.



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## SECTION I.

### THE DIFFICULTIES ATTENDANT UPON DEISTICAL INFIDELITY, IN REGARD TO ITS POSSIBLE GROUNDS AND REASONS.

IN their various controversies with infidel writers, the advocates of Revelation have generally contented themselves with standing upon the *defensive*. Against the enemies of their faith they have rarely undertaken *offensive* operations. Difficulties indeed they have removed, and objections they have answered, when started by the ingenuity of a deistical opponent : but they have for the most part neglected to urge the manifold objections and the serious difficulties, which attend upon his own system. Hence, so far as I can judge, they have needlessly given him the advantage, which an assailant will always at least seem to possess over a person assailed.

With this view of the question, it is not my purpose to consider the sundry matters, which from time to time have been brought forward by deistical authors against the Holy Scriptures : such a task, in the present state of the controversy, may well be deemed superfluous ; for, in truth, it would be merely to repeat and to answer objections, which have already been made and answered again and again. I am rather inclined to state a few of the numerous difficulties with which the infidel scheme itself is encumbered. Whence, unless indeed they can be satisfactorily removed, there will arise a strong presumption, that, at some time, and in some place, and after some manner, the Supreme Being has expressly revealed himself to his creature man : and, as the Christian Dispensation, viewed as grounding itself upon the preceding Patriarchal and Levitical Dispensations, is the only form of religion, which, with any reasonable shew of argument, can claim to be a revelation from heaven ; we may not impossibly be brought to a conclusion, that, however much has been said by infidels respecting the easy faith of those who have embraced the Gospel, there is, after all, more real credulity in the disbelief of Christianity than in the belief of it.

I. A discussion of this nature will not improperly commence with a brief examination of what we may suppose to be the possible grounds and reasons of deistical Infidelity.



Now, except the following, I am unable to discern, upon what principles an unbeliever can take his stand with even a moderate share of plausibility.

Either a revelation from heaven is a matter in itself abstractedly impossible.

Or a revelation from heaven is so utterly improbable an occurrence, that it beggars all credibility.

Or, the evidences upon which our reception of every system claiming to be a revelation from heaven is demanded, are so weak and unsatisfactory, that they are insufficient to command our reasonable assent.

Or, in the case of every system claiming this divine character, numerous objections and difficulties exist; which objections and difficulties are so formidable, that they cannot be answered and removed.

Or, as various systems have alike claimed to be revelations from heaven, and as the advocates of each system are equally forward in maintaining their own to the exclusion of every other, the shrewd presumption with a philosophical inquirer will be, that all these systems are, without exception, mere interested impositions upon the credulity of mankind.

Or, lastly, as our unassisted reason is the sole instrument by which our duty is to be determined; so our natural reason, when properly and honestly used, is, in itself, quite sufficient for this purpose: consequently, a revelation from God is no less unnecessary in the abstract, than the claim of any particular theological system to be received as a revelation from God is unfounded in the concrete.

These several grounds and reasons of Infidelity shall be considered in the order wherein they stand.

1. The first possible ground is the position, that, *in the very nature of things, a revelation from heaven cannot take place.*

If this position has ever been seriously maintained by any writer of the deistical school, the difficulty, inseparably attendant upon it, will be found in the necessary consequence which it involves; a consequence no less formidable than an eventual denial of God's omnipotence.

That such is indeed its necessary consequence, will appear from the following syllogism.

God can do every thing, which is not in itself a contradiction. But it can never be shewn, that a revelation from God to man implies any contradiction. Therefore a revelation from God to man is abstractedly possible.

From the terms of this syllogism it is evident, that the abstract possibility of a revelation from God to man cannot be

denied, without a concomitant denial of God's omnipotence. A denial therefore of God's omnipotence is the necessary consequence of maintaining the position before us. Whence it follows, that the present position, involving a denial of God's omnipotence, involves also, in the creed both of the deist and of the Christian, a gross and palpable absurdity.

2. The second possible ground of Infidelity is the position, that *a revelation from heaven is in itself so improbable an occurrence, that it beggars all credibility.*

Respecting this position, the deist himself will allow, that man, a rational and intellectual being, has been placed in the present world by no other than by an all-wise Creator.

But, that he must have been placed here for some adequate purpose correspondent with the rational and intellectual character both of his Creator and of himself, cannot be controverted, without controverting at the same time the wisdom of God: for it could be no proof of wisdom, that man should have been placed in his present sphere of existence purely through unmeaning caprice, and without any suitable definite end being proposed.

This point, therefore, being granted (as I presume it *must* be granted by a candid and sensible deist,) the question immediately arises: whether God's purpose in creating intellectual man, would more probably be accomplished, by a regular communication, or by a systematic withholding, of instruction?

Such is the question, which forthwith arises from the necessary concession before us.

Now for any one gravely to assert, that the most probable mode, in which God could accomplish his purpose, would be studiously to withhold all instruction from his rational creature, seems so very paradoxical, and so entirely contrary to every analogy which presents itself to us, that I can scarcely believe such an assertion would ever be made in sober earnest. But to allow, that the most probable mode in which God could accomplish his purpose, would be to communicate instruction to man, is the same as to allow, that *the communicating of a divine revelation* is a more probable circumstance, than *the withholding of one.*

Nor can this conclusion be ever avoided, save through the medium of demonstrating, that the best mode of ensuring the accomplishment of God's purpose in creating man, is carefully to refrain from giving him the least instruction or information; so that, thus having the full benefit of complete ignorance, he may be the more amply qualified to answer the end and purpose of his creation. For, let it only be granted that God is

all-wise, and then it must also be granted, that he will always take the most effectual means to accomplish his purpose. Hence the question will finally be brought to the following point: *whether it be easier to believe, that knowledge or ignorance on the part of man, respecting the purpose of his Creator, is the most efficacious in the way of securing its accomplishment.* They who contend for the superior efficacy of ignorance, will adhere to the party of the deist: they, on the contrary, who maintain the superior efficacy of knowledge, will join the ranks of the Christian. A difference of opinion on this subject there doubtless may be: but the question in that case must ever remain, whether the deist who pleads for the efficacy of ignorance, or the Christian who pleads for the efficacy of knowledge, evinces the higher degree of credulity.

3. A third possible ground of infidelity is the position, that *the evidences upon which our reception of every system claiming to be a revelation from heaven is demanded, are so weak and unsatisfactory, that they are insufficient to command our reasonable assent.*

Should this position be assumed by the unbeliever, while we disclaim the vindication of any theological system except that which is propounded in the Bible, as being a matter wholly foreign to the question at issue between us, we have a clear right to expect and demand a regular confutation of the arguments, which are advanced in our best treatises on the evidences of Judaism and Christianity; such, for instance, as the well-known and popular writings of Leslie and Paley: for it is nugatory to say, that the evidences in favour of the Bible being a divine revelation are weak and unsatisfactory; while yet no regular confutation of the arguments, upon which those evidences rest, is pretended to be brought forward. To start difficulties is one thing: to answer arguments, another. Now the mere starting of an insulated difficulty is no answer to a regular argument. The work, which we have a right to demand, is a work in which the author shall go regularly through the treatises (we will say) of Leslie and Paley; taking argument after argument, successively shewing their utter inconclusiveness, and then bringing out the triumphant result, that *the evidences of a divine revelation are too weak and unsatisfactory to command our reasonable assent.* Let this be done; and we may allow the present ground of infidelity to be tenable: but simply to assert that the evidences are insufficient, while not an attempt is made to give a regular answer to the various arguments which have been brought forward by writers on the evidences, is plainly an assertion without proof. If

the evidences be *indeed* insufficient, it must doubtless be easy to answer the arguments. Why, then, has no reply been given to them? Why is a mere naked, gratuitous assertion made, as to the insufficiency of the evidences, while the arguments yet remain unanswered? Such silence is not a little suspicious: and it is difficult to refrain from conjecturing, that vague assertion is found to be more easy than regular confutation, and a starting of insulated difficulties less toilsome than a formal reply to a series of close reasoning.

4. Accordingly, a fourth ground of Infidelity is the position, that *numerous objections and difficulties exist in the case of each system claiming the character of a divine revelation; which objections and difficulties cannot be answered and removed.*

Here, as before, it may be remarked, that with the objections and difficulties which exist in the case of any system, save that contained in the Bible, we have no concern: the only point between the infidel and the Christian is, whether any such position can be reasonably taken up in regard to that scheme of religion, which is set forth in Scripture as being of divine origin and authority.

The present position, as being likely to produce a very considerable effect with but a small expense of labour and trouble, has ever been a prime favourite with the deistical school, from generation to generation: and, accordingly, it is upon this principle, that the works of infidel writers are generally constructed. As I have already observed, no attempt is made to combat the strong and invincible arguments, by which the divine authority of Judaism and Christianity is established: but various difficulties are industriously produced, more or less plausible; and on the strength of these difficulties it is contended, that our religion has no legitimate claim to the character of a revelation from heaven.

Now, even if the objections and difficulties in question could not be answered and removed, it may be doubted whether the argument of the deist, which is founded upon them, could well be deemed logically conclusive. When honestly thrown into the form of a syllogism, the argument will run as follows:

A religion, claiming to be a revelation from heaven, is demonstrated to be such by a train of close reasoning upon its evidences; which it has been found impossible to confute through the medium of a regular answer, article by article. But, in regard to sundry matters connected with this religion, objections may be made and difficulties may be started. There-



fore such religion has no legitimate claim to be deemed a revelation from heaven.

Here, when divested of much noise and smoke, we have the sum and substance of the argument, which, in the opinion of the infidel, is sufficient to overturn Christianity. A fact is established by the highest possible degree of moral evidence : but certain difficulties may be started : therefore the fact must not be credited.

In good truth, if we admit the conclusiveness of such reasoning as this, (and it is the only reasoning which occurs in the writings of most authors of the infidel school,) we shall make but short and sorry work with history. Where is the best established fact, against which objections may not be raised ? But, if objections may be raised against it ; then, according to the deistical argument before us, it is not to be believed.

By way of specimen, let us take the case of Cyrus, and reason upon it after the deistical fashion.

The fact of the existence of Cyrus, as the sovereign of the Medo-Persian and the subverter of the Babylonian Empire, is established by such strong moral evidence, that, if we reject it, we must reject all history and sink into universal scepticism. But, in regard to this fact, a serious difficulty occurs : for Herodotus and Xenophon give us two accounts of Cyrus so essentially different, that by no human ingenuity can they be reconciled together. Therefore no such person as Cyrus ever existed.

What should we think of the credulity, which could implicitly adopt this mode of reasoning as valid and conclusive ? Yet such is the precise mode of reasoning, which of all others is the most commonly employed by infidel writers against Christianity. The clear evidence in favour of it they pretermitt without an answer : they content themselves with starting difficulties : and then, on the score of these difficulties alone, they take upon themselves to reject it, though in the face of the very strongest conceivable evidence.

A process of this description would, I apprehend, be wholly unsatisfactory on any intelligible principles of ratiocination, even if the objections could not be answered and the difficulties removed : for, if objections and difficulties are to be admitted against positive unanswered evidence ; there is an end of all moral certainty, and the reign of universal scepticism is forthwith introduced. What then shall we say, when the various objections and difficulties, started by infidels in the case of divine revelation, have again and again been met and answered and solved ? There is nothing new under the sun.

It may probably be asserted with truth, that not a single cavil is to be found in the writings of modern deists, which has not been both adduced and answered long before they themselves were born.

The sum, therefore, of the present matter is, that in direct opposition to positive unanswered evidence, the infidel calls upon us to reject Christianity on the strength of certain insulated objections; which objections have repeatedly been most fully answered.

5. A fifth ground of Infidelity is the position, that, *as various theological systems have alike claimed to be revelations from heaven, and as the advocates of each system have been equally forward in maintaining their own to the exclusion of every other, the shrewd presumption with a philosophical inquirer will be, that all these systems are, without exception, mere interested impositions upon the credulity of mankind.*

This is the position, which has been taken by Mr. Volney. With a considerable degree of picturesque stage-effect, all nations upon the face of the earth, accompanied by the priests of their several religions, appear before the French Philosopher and his attendant hierophantic genius. Each sacerdotal college claims, for its own theological system, the character of a divine revelation. Now it is perfectly clear, that *every* claim of this description cannot be deemed valid. Hence Mr. Volney and his genius sagaciously conclude, that *no* such claim can be rationally admitted.

Such, when stripped of its gaudy plumage, is the formidable argument, by which this gentleman proposes to destroy Christianity root and branch. Less adventurous inquirers would probably have acted somewhat differently. Various theological systems are presented to them. All equally claiming the authority of a divine revelation. In this emergency what is to be done? The most natural answer to such a question might, I presume, be given in the words of Holy Writ: *Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.\** Let us carefully examine the evidences, by which these various theological systems are supported. If there be no sufficient evidence for any one of them, then let them all be equally rejected. But, if in any single case the evidence be sufficient, while in every other case it is insufficient; then let the well attested system be received, while the ill-attested systems are rejected.

This mode of proceeding appears to be obvious and rational, notwithstanding it happens to be recommended by an

\* 1 Thessal. v. 21.



apostle of the Christian faith : at least, we are very apt, in the common affairs of life, to resort to what is strictly analogical. Numerous persons put in their respective claims to a vacant estate. *Every one* of them, it is quite plain, cannot be the legitimate heir. What then is to be done : Is a calm and regular investigation to be entered upon, for the purpose of determining the validity or the invalidity of each claim ; so that the lawful heir may be admitted to his just right, while every unwarranted pretender is set aside ? Or is the whole body of claimants to be forthwith dismissed, without ceremony and without inquiry, on the principle adopted by Mr. Volney and luminously set forth by his attendant genius ; that, because *every one* cannot be the lawful heir, *THEREFORE no one* can ? Truly, if the principle of our philosophic Frenchman were to be acted upon in our courts of justice, it would occasion no small amazement and speculation : and I cannot help suspecting, that if Mr. Volney himself were with many others the claimant of a valuable estate, and if his pretensions were to be as rapidly disposed of as *he* is pleased to dispose of the pretensions of Christianity, he would not be *quite* satisfied with the equity of the adjudication, but would be apt to move for a new decision in a higher court.

Let us, however, throw Mr. Volney's argument into a regular syllogism ; which operation I have always found specially useful in dispelling the dense artificial fogs, raised at will by infidel controversialists.

Various theological systems equally and respectively claim to be a revelation from heaven. But it is impossible, that *every one* of these systems can be a divine revelation. Therefore *no one* of them is a revelation from heaven.

In this single syllogism we have the sum total of the argument, which pervades the entire celebrated work of Mr. Volney. Its validity will be readily estimated by a familiar application of its principle.

Various bank-notes equally and respectively claim to be genuine. But it is positively ascertained, that *many* of them are forgeries. Therefore, by every rule of sound logic, *all* of them must inevitably be forgeries likewise.

6. A sixth ground of infidelity is the position, that, *as our unassisted reason is the sole instrument by which our duty is to be determined, so our reason when properly and honestly used is in itself quite sufficient for this purpose ; consequently, a revelation from God is no less unnecessary in the abstract, than the claim of any particular theological system to be received as a revelation from God is unfounded in the concrete.*

When Mr. Volney has happily rid himself of *all* religions by the compendious process already noticed, he then confidently takes the position now before us.

*Investigate*, says the assembled multitude to his college of imaginary legislators : *Investigate the laws, which nature, for our direction, has implanted in our breasts ; and form from thence an authentic and immutable code. Nor let this code be calculated for one family or one nation only, but for the whole without exception. Be the legislators of the human race, as you are the interpreters of their common nature. Shew us the line, that separates the world of chimeras from that of realities ; and teach us, after so many religions of error and delusion, the religion of evidence and truth.*

With respect to the sufficiency or the insufficiency of the light of nature, it is obviously a matter of opinion. Mr. Volney deems it so sufficient, that he thinks nothing can be more easy than to frame from it *an authentic and immutable code*, to which the whole race of mankind, without a single dissenting voice, will readily subscribe : Socrates, on the contrary, deems it so palpably insufficient, that, in the well known and familiar record of his pupil Plato, he avows his despair of attaining to any thing like certainty, until some divine teacher shall leave his native skies for the purpose of communicating sure and tangible knowledge.\*

Here, even *in limine*, we have a most important difference of opinion between two celebrated characters : the one ancient, the other modern ; the one the pride of reasoning Greece, the other the glory of emancipated France. How then are we to decide between these two illustrious luminaries of Athens and of Paris ?

*All is quite clear and certain by the light of nature alone : we want no revelation to illuminate our pretended darkness.* So speaks Mr. Volney to the deeply thinking philosophers of the Gallic metropolis.

*All is quite dark and obscure by the unassisted light of nature : we can never attain to certain knowledge, save by a revelation from him who careth for us.* So of old spake Socrates to his anxiously inquisitive pupil Alcibiades.

Now, with such an immense difference of opinion before

\* Σ. Αναγκαιον ουν εστι περιμενειν, εως αν τις μαθη πως δει προς θεους και προς ανθρωπους διακεισθαι. Α. Ποτε ουν παρεσται ο χρονος ουτος, ω Σωκρατες ; και τις ο παιδευσαν ; ηδιστα γαρ αν μυι δοκω ιδειν τουτον τον ανθρωπον, τις εστιν. Σ. 'Ουτος εστιν, ω μελει τερει σου. Plat. Alcib. ii. in Dial. Select. ed. Cantab. p. 255, 256.

us, what hope can we reasonably entertain of the easy formation of *an authentic and immutable code*, in which all mankind shall cheerfully and unanimously acquiesce: or how can we build with any confidence on the infidel position, that, as the light of nature is in itself sufficient without any revelation from God, such a revelation is thence altogether useless and unnecessary? Socrates thinks with the Christian: Mr. Volney, with the deist. Shall we symbolize with the Greek or with the Frank?

But, whatever may be thought on this point (and I shall hereafter consider, somewhat largely, the capabilities of the light of nature,)\* it appears to be rather an extraordinary process to reject Christianity, on the disputed ground that *human reason alone is sufficient*, while the various arguments, on which is built the evidence of its claim to be received as a divine revelation, still remain unanswered. An abstract notion, itself all the while a disputed notion, Mr. Volney maintaining and Socrates denying its propriety; an abstract notion, so circumstanced, can never be rationally admitted against direct unconfuted evidence to a fact. He therefore, who can be content to found his system upon so insecure a basis, may, I think, be more justly charged with an easy faith or a fond credulity, than he, who cautiously deems such a basis inadequate to support the proposed superstructure.

II. In the present stage of the argument then, the believer admits Christianity to be a revelation from God on the following several grounds.

A revelation from heaven is, in the abstract, a circumstance clearly possible.

From a consideration of the wisdom of the Creator and the ignorance of the created, the fact of a divine revelation is highly probable.

The evidence in favour of Christianity being a divine revelation is so strong, that it cannot be reasonably controverted; more especially as the arguments, upon which the evidence rests, have never yet been confuted.

Mere difficulties, even if unanswerable, cannot set aside direct and positive evidence; still less therefore can they set it aside, when they have been fully and repeatedly solved.

Numerous pretended revelations, like copious issues of base coin, are no proof of the non-existence of that which is genuine: but the false may be readily distinguished from the true by a careful and honest examination of their respective evidences.

\* See below Sect. ii.

Finally, as our unassisted reason is an insufficient teacher, a matter long since acknowledged by the wisest of the Greeks, a revelation from God is no less necessary in the abstract, than the claim of Christianity to be received as such a revelation is well founded in the concrete.

III. On the other hand, still in the present stage of the argument, the unbeliever denies Christianity to be a revelation from God on the following several grounds.

Although a revelation may perhaps in itself be possible, yet the fact of one is very highly improbable: because it is to the last degree unlikely, that an all-wise Creator should deem it necessary to give any instructions to a rational but inevitably ignorant being, whom he had created.

The evidence, in favour of Christianity being a divine revelation, is insufficient; though no infidel has hitherto been able to confute the arguments, on which it rests.

Insulated objections to a fact, notwithstanding they may have been repeatedly answered, are quite sufficient with a reasonable inquirer to set aside the very strongest unanswered evidence.

As *many* pretended revelations are confessedly impostures, therefore *all* alleged revelations must clearly be impostures, likewise.

Lastly, as our unassisted reason is held by some philosophers to be a sufficient teacher, while others declare it to be wholly insufficient. A revelation from God is quite unnecessary: nor ought any claim of this character to be admitted, though it may rest on the very strongest unconfuted arguments.

IV. Such are the principles, and such the systems, of the Christian and the infidel.

Whether it argues a high degree of credulity to receive, as a divine revelation, Christianity thus evidenced; or, in order to the rejection of it, contentedly to bow beneath such an extraordinary mass of contradictory difficulties, as the theory of the infidel is constrained to support: let the prudent inquirer judge and determine for himself.



## SECTION II.

### THE DIFFICULTIES ATTENDANT UPON DEISTICAL INFIDELITY IN THE ABSTRACT REJECTION OF ALL REVELATION FROM GOD.

Mr. Volney and other writers of the same school, in plain defiance of the more modest confession of Socrates, contend, that the light of nature alone is an amply sufficient teacher: so that, by its sole aid, *an authentic and immutable code*, which shall readily command the assent of all mankind, may very easily be formed. *Shew us*, say the people freed (as Mr. Volney expresses it) from their fetters and prejudices, *the line, that separates the world of chimeras from that of realities; and teach us, after so many religions of error and delusion, the religion of evidence and truth.* To this humble request the French philosopher kindly assents; and for the instruction of the disabused multitude, draws up, what he styles, *The Law of Nature, or principles of morality deduced from the physical constitution of Mankind and the Universe.*

Now, unfortunately, some of the very first principles, on which this with other similar schemes of natural religion is founded, cannot themselves be certainly known without the aid of a revelation from heaven. Hence it is clear, that such a system, instead of being *a religion of evidence and truth* (the character much too hastily claimed for it by Mr. Volney,) is in fact nothing better than a religion of vague conjecture and unauthorized speculation.

I. The deist, as his very title implies, lays it down as the basis of that natural religion which he advocates, that *there is one God the Creator and Moderator of all things.*

This dogma may appear so obvious, that few, it might be suspected, would controvert it, even placing revelation altogether out of the question, save the atheist: and, laboriously to answer *his* folly, might equally, both by the deist and by the Christian, be well deemed labour thrown away. Yet the very first objection, which I would make to the deistical scheme, is the defect of legitimate proof under which its leading dogma most certainly labours.

*There is one only God, says the deist, the Creator and Moderator of all things; by whom the universe was brought originally into being, and through whom it subsists.*



In reply, I request to be informed, upon *his* principles, how he knows, that there is only one God, respecting whom such matters may be truly predicated.

His answer, no doubt, will be, that the existence of a God is decidedly proved by the very frame of the universe. Evident design must needs imply a designer. But evident design is conspicuous in every part of the universe: and, the wider our physical researches are extended, the more conspicuously does this design appear. Therefore, just as we argue the existence of a watchmaker from the evident design which may be observed in a watch, so we argue the existence of a Creator from the evident design which may be observed in the universe. To bring out any other conclusion involves the same palpable absurdity, as to contend, that a watch assumed its orderly form by chance, and that it certainly never had a maker.

The cogency of this argument I most readily allow, so far as its *principle* is concerned: but I must be permitted to doubt, how far it will serve the purpose of a deist, who depends solely upon his own reason and who rejects the authority of revelation. It is perfectly true, that evident design must needs imply a designer: and it is equally true, that evident design shines out in every part of the universe. But we reason inconclusively, if, with the deist, we thence infer the existence of *one* and *only one*, supreme designer. That a universe, upon which design is so evidently impressed, must have been created, is indeed abundantly clear: nor will *this* point be ever controverted, save by the gross folly of Atheism. But, that a universe, thus characterized, was created by *one* Supreme God, is not at all clear upon the principles of deistical Infidelity. It may, for ought the deist knows to the contrary, have been created by a collective body of Gods, perfectly harmonizing in design, and jointly bringing the great work to a completion. The argument, from *the evident design impressed upon the universe*, proves indeed, that the universe must have been first designed and then created: but it is incapable of proving, that the universe had no more than a *single* designer. Whether we suppose one designer or many designers, and thence one creator or many creators, the phenomenon of *evident design in the creation* will be equally accounted for: and, beyond this, the argument in question, as managed upon deistical principles, neither does nor can reach. The deist, I allow, can prove very satisfactorily and without the aid of revelation, that the universe, marked as it is in all its parts by evident design, must have been itself designed and therefore

created: but he never did, and he never can, prove, without the aid of revelation, that the universe was designed by a *single* designer. He rejects, however, the aid of revelation: therefore, on his own principles, he cannot prove so much as the very dogma from which he borrows his name.

To this objection he will answer, (I am fully aware) that the theory of *one designer* is much more simple than the theory of *many designers*, and therefore that it ought to be preferred and adopted.

What he says may be true enough: but still, on deistical principles, where is the *proof*? On those principles, it is highly *probable*, that there is no more than one God. But *probability* is not *certainty*: and I will venture to say, without any fear of well-grounded contradiction, that, even in the first article of his creed, the deist can attain to no greater elevation than bare *probability*. Nay, were we so disposed, we might contest even *this* point with him. On the same ground, that he pleads for the higher probability of a single designer, in the case of the universe; he stands pledged, would he preserve consistency, to plead for the higher probability of a single designer, in the case of a watch. Yet that instrument, as we all know, was not struck out at a heat, by one intellect; and still less are its several component parts fashioned by a single hand. In short when the deist has arrived at the conclusion, that *the universe must have been designed and created*: he must search for some new argument to prove that it had only a *single* designer and creator. If he fail in demonstrating this vital point, his system will limp from its very birth: and, to style himself a *deist* rather than a *polytheist*, will be a virtual begging of the question. He has no solid ground for maintaining, either the *unity of the Godhead* on the one hand, or a *plurality of Gods* on the other hand. For ought he knows to the contrary, there may be only one God: and, for aught he knows to the contrary, there may be many Gods. He thinks fit indeed to worship only one God; and, from that circumstance, he chooses to borrow his title: but, whether he be right or wrong in so doing, and whether his title be properly or improperly adopted, he is of necessity, on *his* principles, wholly and irremediably ignorant.

II. Let us however suppose, that by some powerful argument hitherto unproduced, the deist has satisfactorily proved the existence of one only God: we shall then have next to inquire, what certain information he possesses respecting the divine attributes.

He will be quite sure, that God is a very powerful being;

because, otherwise, he plainly could not be the creator and governor of the universe : and he will perhaps *guess* that he is omnipotent, though he may find it difficult absolutely to *prove* that point. He will also not unreasonably infer, that God must be eternal : for, unless he be eternal retrospectively, his existence will have commenced without a cause ; and, unless he be eternal prospectively, his existence must needs cease through the instrumentality of some cause brought by himself into being and therefore weaker than himself, which is a palpable contradiction. But in the present enigmatical state of the world, enigmatical to all who reject revelation, how will the deist establish, what I presume he holds, the moral attributes of the Divinity.

1. The deist and the Christian, unless I wholly mistake, alike contend, that *God is a God of perfect justice*. Here the Christian, taking his stand upon revelation, feels himself to be planted upon sure ground ; but how does the deist make good this position ?

If we look around us into the world, we shall find nothing more proverbially common than the triumph of successful worthlessness and the depression of unsuccessful worthiness. The worst of mankind perpetually enjoy the largest share of the good things of life, while they seem to receive them as if for the sole purpose of abusing them ; and the best of mankind are often destitute even of bare necessities, though they of all others would plainly make the best use of riches. Nor yet is this the whole that may be remarked in the perplexing world, which we inhabit. If there be any such thing as the moral sense, and if we can form any clear idea of an impartial moral governor, we must be compelled to anticipate *a priori*, that rewards will uniformly follow virtue, and that punishment will uniformly follow vice. But, if we look out into the world, no arrangement of this description actually takes place. The whole is one mass of inextricable confusion. Bodily pain and sickness, bodily comfort and health, are indifferently distributed with little or no regard to moral character. Some vices, it is true, are apt to bring after them their own punishment ; but this is by no means the case invariably. So far from it, in very many instances, the vicious are almost wholly free from pain and sickness, while the virtuous never know what it is to be exempt from them. Now, if God be a God of perfect justice, how will the deist account for these notorious facts ? He may say indeed, that worldly prosperity and adversity, depending as they do in a good measure upon the exertions either of men themselves or of their ancestors, cannot be described as so di-



rectly proceeding from the Deity, and therefore cannot be alleged as so directly affecting our estimate of his justice. But this solution will by no means hold good in the case of pain and sickness and (what are styled) casualties, together with the opposites of each : because they are wholly out of the reach of man, and depend altogether upon the will of God the moral governor of the universe. How then does the deist reconcile such a disposition of things with God's attribute of perfect justice? Or rather, to put the question in a more correct form, by what process of reasoning does he prove, that the attribute of perfect justice belongs to God?

Can he prove the point by any thing, which passes under his eyes in this present world? I think not : for it is obvious, that the mere *occasional* good health and prosperity of the virtuous, and the mere *occasional* sickness and adversity of the vicious, will be very far from proving that God is a perfectly just being. To bring out the result of perfect justice, their proper moral consequences, in the way of reward and punishment, ought *uniformly* to follow virtue and vice. But, that such is actually the case in the present constitution of things, no one will pretend to assert. Therefore it is but lost labour for the deist to attempt to demonstrate the perfect justice of God from the present constitution of the world.

Will he seek then to prove the point, by calling in a future state of retribution, when all the moral irregularities of this world, for whatever cause permitted by its governor, will be rectified and compensated?

With respect to such a solution, when propounded on deistical principles, it lies open to two very palpable objections.

In the first place, if we concede to the deist that God will administer a future world with perfect justice, this circumstance will not do away the previous circumstance, that (on deistical principles) he has confessedly administered this present world with injustice. Would the deist prove that the attribute of *perfect* justice belongs to God, he must establish his justice not only in the next world but in the present world also. Yet, by the very turn of the argument, he quite gives the matter up, so far as this present world is concerned. Therefore, allowing his premises, we must still contend, that he has wholly failed of establishing the *perfect* justice of God.

But, in the second place, we cannot allow to the deist, on *his* principles, the validity of his premises. His premises are *the existence of a future state of retribution*. But how does the deist establish these premises themselves without the aid of revelation? How does *he* know, that there *is* a future state of

retribution? Before he can be allowed to argue from it, he must prove its existence. How then does he prove, that any such state exists at all? On *his* principles, it is clearly incapable of proof: unless we admit the circulating syllogism to be sound reasoning. The deist may indeed prove *a future state of retribution* from *the perfect justice of God*: but then he cannot be allowed also to prove *the perfect justice of God* from *a future state of retribution*. What he is at present called upon to demonstrate is *the perfect justice of God*. But this he can only do through the medium of *a future state of retribution*.—And it is utterly impossible for *him* to demonstrate *a future state of retribution* except through the medium of *the perfect justice of God*. Therefore he is quite unable to prove, that *God is a perfectly just being*. He may indeed choose to *assert* the perfect justice of God: but, in *his* case, it is bare assertion and nothing else. His reasoning, in short, when thrown into a scholastic form, will run as follows. *Unless there be a future state of retribution, God is not a God of perfect justice. But God is a God of perfect justice. Therefore there is a future state of retribution.* Here *a future state of retribution* is demonstrated through the medium of *God's perfect justice*: but, unfortunately, the deist has to demonstrate *God's perfect justice* itself also. What then is to be done in this emergency? Invert the terms of the syllogism, or, in other words, reason in a circle; and the business will be accomplished. *If there be no future state of retribution, then God is not a God of perfect justice. But there is a future state of retribution. Therefore God is a God of perfect justice.* Here *God's perfect justice* is demonstrated through the medium of *a future state of retribution*.

2. The deist alike and the Christian, I believe, further maintain, that *God is a God of mercy* no less than a God of justice. But how, upon his own principles, can the deist vindicate his belief?

If he beheld a fellow-mortal, racking and torturing another fellow-mortal by every refinement of the most ingenious cruelty; not forthwith bringing his misery to a termination, but industriously prolonging it through days and through weeks and through months and through years: he would certainly, without hesitation, pronounce the disposition of that man to be strongly and indisputably characterized by cruelty. Now he need not cast his eyes very far abroad, in order to behold precisely the same deeds performed by God: and that too, not once merely and as it were accidentally, but repeatedly and perpetually. Let him consider the case of a man, labouring for



years under the torment of the stone, or gradually devoured by a cancer, or wasting away inch by inch under the baleful influence of the scrophula. The bitter sufferings of such a man are plainly both caused and prolonged by the immediate hand of God. Did it suit his good pleasure, he might either have never caused them at all, or he might bring them to a speedy termination through the agency of death, or he might grant instantaneous relief to the sufferer. Not one of these, however, is the line of conduct, which he thinks fit to adopt. On the contrary, he places a miserable being upon the rack, and there he retains him. It is true indeed, that bodily sufferings inflicted by the hand of God, and bodily sufferings inflicted by the hand of man, do not with equal force strike upon our imagination: because, on the scaffold, we actually behold the executioner straining and tearing the sinews of his victim; while, in the chamber of languishing pain and sickness, the mysterious Being, who inflicts the torment, is to mortal eyes invisible.—But the agent of misery is not more real, because he is seen; neither is he less real, because he is unseen. Many men have been found, who appear to delight both in the infliction and in the view of the most horrid corporeal sufferings; these the deist pronounces to be palpably merciless. The Supreme Being perpetually condemns his creatures to bodily torment, no less severe, and much more prolonged than any torture of human invention: him the deist pronounces to be doubtless a God of mercy. Now why does he come to two such directly opposite conclusions from the very same premises? Upon his own principles, he can know nothing of the moral attributes of God, save what he can collect from the divine operations. Why then does he call him *a God of mercy*, when yet he is observed to perform the identical actions which procure for a human being the undisputed character of the most revolting cruelty?

Probably the deist may reply, that the cruelty of an action depends upon its intent: for the very same deed, which under some circumstances is horribly cruel, under other circumstances will present an aspect wholly the reverse. Thus the tyrant, who delights wantonly to torture his victims and to feast upon their groans, we denominate *cruel*: but the skilful practitioner, who inflicts even the most acute pain upon a diseased patient, we respect as a man both of science and humanity. On this principle, we are not to suppose that God sends bodily suffering upon his creatures because he has any abstract delight in their misery: but he sends it, as a powerful instrument of

moral discipline, to reclaim them from error, and to draw them more closely to himself.

Such an answer, (and, I think, we may safely assert it to be the only possible answer to the present difficulty) is perfectly valid and conclusive in the mouth of a Christian :\* but it is not quite so easy to conceive the propriety of its appearance in the mouth of a deist, who systematically discards revelation. If the life of man be confined to his present state of existence, we may well doubt the moral utility of a protracted and painful sickness which terminates only with the death of the subject. We may readily indeed comprehend the beneficial effects of such a malady, provided it occurs in youth or in middle age, and provided the sufferer be finally restored to sound health : but we shall not very readily comprehend them, if the malady end only with death, and if death be followed by annihilation. Allow a future state : and then, no doubt, every difficulty will vanish ; for pain and sickness will then appear under their proper aspect of a merciful moral discipline, by which the aspirant is weaned from this world and gradually fitted for the glories of a better world ; just as, analogically, boys are fitted, by the severe and irksome discipline of school, honourably to play their parts in the future state of manhood. But I see not how a deist can consistently avail himself of this solution. Before he can be allowed to argue from *a future state of retribution*, he must prove its existence. But its existence he never *can* prove upon *his* principles. For he will encounter precisely the same difficulty in vindicating the mercy of God, as he encountered in vindicating his justice. He cannot demonstrate *the mercy of God*, save through the medium of *a future state of retribution* : and he cannot prove *the existence of a future state of retribution*, save by the vicious and inconclusive expedient of reasoning in a circle ; that is to say, by alternately demonstrating *a future retributory state* from *the moral attributes of God*, and *the moral attributes of God* from *a future retributory state*.

3. The deists, again, and the Christian equally maintain, *that God is a God of goodness* : but still, as before, the arguments of the deist will be found, I fear, to labour.

\* Heb. xii. 5—11. The same answer, when given by a Christian, is perfectly conclusive also in regard to the absolute justice of God both in this world and in the next, as discussed under the last head : for, when the doctrine of *moral discipline* is introduced, (a doctrine taught explicitly in Scripture, but incapable of any legitimate proof on deistical principles ;) we readily perceive, that the trials of the good, and the prosperity of the bad, during the present state of things, are no impeachment of the divine justice.

In the prosecution of this topic, he may indeed expatiate largely upon the beneficence so conspicuous in the works of the creation, and he may urge that moral arrangement by which virtue is its own best reward : but we may doubt, whether, with *his* scanty materials, he can effect more than the probability that God is a being of a mixed nature. Much, certainly, may be said on the side of his goodness : but then, unfortunately, much also may be said on the other side of the question. If God be good, we may ask the deist, why does he so often stamp the impress of his seeming approbation upon vice, by suffering it to be prosperous and triumphant ? If God be good, why does he so often stamp the impress of his seeming disapprobation upon virtue, by suffering it to be afflicted, and depressed, and trampled under foot ? If God be good, why has he created man with such a strange tendency to evil, that, in despite of his better judgment, he is ever prone to choose the bad and to reject the good ? If God be good, why has he made the road of virtue even proverbially rough and difficult, and disagreeable, while the road of vice is pleasant, and smooth, and easy, and inviting ?\* If God be good, why are populous cities, with all their inhabitants, swallowed up by earthquakes ? why are the tremendous devastations of volcanoes permitted ; why does the tempestuous ocean yearly ingulph thousands ? in one word, why is death, with all its horrors, permitted ? why, if the existence of man be designedly finite, is he not quietly dismissed at the appointed time, without any circumstances of pain and sickness to himself, without any circumstances of anxious terror and secret misgivings to the survivors ? It is not enough to say, that it is as natural for a man to fall sick and to die, as it is for him to be born. A palpable truism, framed upon his present condition, is no answer to a difficulty. The question will still recur, if God be good, WHY did he make it natural for man to sicken and to die : WHY did he send him into the world, circumstanced as we all know by mournful experience that he *is* circumstanced : WHY did he form him with a propensity to evil, rather than to good ? We want not to be told, that such things *are* : we rather want to be told, if God be indeed a God of goodness, WHY such things are.

\* Την μεντοι κακοτητα και ιλαδον εστιν ελεσθαι

Ρηιδίως· ολιγη μεν οδος, μαλα δ' εγγυθι ναιει.

Της δ' αρετης ιδρωτα θεοι προπαροισθεν εθηκαν

Αθανατοι· μακρος δε και ορθιος οϊμος επ' αυτην,

Και τρηχυς. Hesiod. Oper. et dier. lib. i. ver. 284—289.

All these difficulties are solved by revelation : but as the deist rejects revelation, he stands pledged, either to account for them satisfactorily by the unassisted light of human reason, or else to acknowledge himself incapable of proving that God possesses the moral attribute of goodness. By what process he will seek to establish his point I pretend not to say : on deistical principles, I see not how we can reach higher than the probability that God is a being of a mixed nature, not very unlikely to man himself (as in truth the old pagans feigned their deities to be,) partly good and partly bad.

III. Thus wholly unable to ascertain the moral attributes of the Godhead, the deist cannot but be utterly in the dark, as to *what service will be most acceptable to him* : for if he be ignorant of the nature of those attributes, he must plainly be ignorant also, as to what actions will be pleasing or displeasing to the Divinity.

The bare difference indeed between virtue and vice, justice and injustice, mercy and cruelty, he can readily discern ; just as he can perceive the difference between hot and cold, wet and dry, hard and soft. He can likewise discern the social utility of virtue and virtuous actions ; whence he will be led to praise those human laws, which encourage rectitude and which punish crimes. But I see not how, upon *his* principles, he can ever be a virtuous man in reference to the Deity : in other words, I see not how, upon *his* principles, it is possible for him to have any religion properly so called. The reason is obvious. He cannot be certain that he will please God by acting justly, until he first knows that God is a God of justice. He cannot be certain that he will please God by acting mercifully, until he first knows that God is merciful, and that he delights in mercy. He cannot be certain that he will please God by labouring after goodness, until he first knows that God is a God of goodness. Without a previous certain knowledge, in short, of the moral attributes of the Deity, it is wholly impossible for him to determine, what line of conduct will be most pleasing to his Creator. Doubtless, if God be just, and good, and merciful, then justice, and goodness, and mercy will be acceptable to him : for like ever delights in like. But here is the difficulty. The deist has no means of ascertaining whether God be just, and good, and merciful, or whether he be unjust, and bad, and unmerciful. Nay, he cannot so much as tell, whether there may not be many Gods, concurring indeed in the creation of the world, but widely differing in their moral attributes ; he cannot tell, whether there may not be two independent principles of good and evil. Under these circum-



stances of total ignorance, how is he to frame a religion for himself? He may fondly imagine, that, by cultivating virtue, he is rendering an acceptable service to the Deity : when, all the while, he is doing what is most abhorrent from the divine nature, and therefore most displeasing. He can have no certainty that the very actions which gratify one God, may not offend another.

Perhaps he will say, that, as it is much more simple, and much more probable, that there should be one God rather than many Gods ; so it is much more probable, that that one God should be a lover of virtue than a lover of vice. Consequently, since, for want of better evidence, a wise man will act upon the greater probability, a prudent deist will prefer and cultivate virtue.

Now what is this but a confession, that the sole religion, which Deism can produce, is a religion of mere probabilities ? Such being the case, the matter of probability may be very differently estimated by different persons. One may deem it by far the most probable conjecture, that there is only one God, and that that God is a God of justice, and mercy, and goodness. Another, perplexed by the prevalence of evil, and yet discerning a considerable mixture of good, may, not unreasonably, while under the tuition of no better guide than the light of nature, incline to think, that the old doctrine of *two independent principles* bids fairest for the truth, inasmuch as it solves, with the greatest shew of plausibility, that enigmatical contrariety which on every side presents itself. Of these two systems, when viewed abstractedly from revelation, and with a sole reference to what meet the unassisted eye, it is perhaps not very easy to determine which is the most probable. What then is to be done, and how is the religion of the deist to be arranged ? If the former system be the nearest to the truth, he will act wisely in cultivating virtue : but if all the while the latter be the reality, it behoves him then to take heed to his ways ; for what is pleasing to the good God, will infallibly be displeasing to the bad God, and what delights the bad God, will assuredly offend the good God. Which of the systems is true, and which is false, or whether each of them be not alike unfounded, the deist, so far as I can comprehend, has no means of determining. Hence, however he may please to modify what is called *the religion of nature*, he can never know whether his religion, with the line of conduct grafted upon it, be a delight or an abomination to the Divinity whom he wishes to honour.\*

\* Mr. Volney, having represented the general assembly of nations,

IV. These, in regard to the general question of a revelation from heaven, are some of the many difficulties, with which deistical Infidelity is on every side surrounded.

The deist cannot certainly pronounce, whether there is one God, or whether there are many Gods; whether there is one independent principle of good which mysteriously permits evil to exist and to triumph, or whether there are two independent principles of good and evil. On the supposition that there is only one God, the deist is quite ignorant as to the nature of his moral attributes: he may form a guess indeed; but he has no sure means of determining, whether this one God be just and good and merciful, or whether he be unjust and bad and unmerciful, or whether he be of a mixed character partly good and partly bad. Thus ignorant as to God's moral attributes, he is of necessity ignorant also as to his own moral obligations so far as the will and pleasure of the Divinity is concerned.

as beseeching the legislators to shew them the line that separates the world of chimeras from that of realities, and to teach them, after so many religions of error and delusion, the religion of evidence and truth; makes his legislators set forth this unerring religion in the following manner:

*The law of nature is the regular and constant order of events, according to which God rules the universe; the order, which his wisdom presents to the senses and reason of mankind, to serve them as an equal and general rule of action, and to conduct them without distinction of country or sect, towards happiness and perfection.*

Here, then, we have the foundation of what Mr. Volney calls *an authentic and immutable code, not calculated for one family or one nation only, but for the whole human race, without exception.* But how is such a code to be built upon such a foundation? And where is that *regular and constant order of events*, according to which God rules the universe? If *physical regularity* be meant; it may doubtless be perceived without any difficulty: but how is a *religion of evidence and truth*, proudly contradistinguished from *religions of error and delusion*, to be founded upon the physical regularity of the mundane system? If *moral regularity* be meant, which is plainly the only regularity capable of sustaining a scheme of natural religion: where is it to be found in the world as now constituted? I readily grant, that if the virtuous were always healthy, and prosperous, and fortunate, every thing turning out agreeably to their wishes, and nothing occurring which could occasion to them the least sorrow or disappointment; while the vicious were always sickly, and poor, and unlucky, every thing crossing their inclinations, and nothing occurring which could give them the least pleasure or satisfaction: in one word, if rewards and punishments as invariably followed virtue and vice, as the earth revolves round its axis, as fire burns, and as like produces like; we should then have a *regular and constant order of events, which, being presented to the senses and reason of mankind, might serve them as an equal and general rule of action.* But where can Mr. Volney find this *regular and constant order of moral events*? Where is the foundation upon which he builds his religion of evidence and truth?

These difficulties, viewed complexly, draw on and involve yet another difficulty. Whatever uncertainty, on the deistical system, may attend on the moral attributes of God; there can be no doubt, as to his vast wisdom and power: these shine out too conspicuously in every part of the creation, to be either doubted or overlooked. Hence, therefore, immediately and inevitably springs up the following difficulty.

The Creator is doubtless a being of vast wisdom and contrivance. Every portion of his works, by its admirable adaptation to a manifest end, is a fixed proof of this his surpassing wisdom: and, the more we are enabled by observation and experiment to comprehend his works, the more forcibly does his wisdom strike upon our apprehension.\* Yet, wise as the Creator may be, and wonderfully skilled in adapting the means to the end, he formed, if the system of the deist be well founded, his rational creature man with a total disregard to all such adaptation. He gave him reason: but, by affording him no fixed *data*, he made his reasoning faculty, in regard to its employment on the noblest subjects, altogether useless. He gave him the power of discerning good from evil: but he gave him no means of discerning their moral difference, by any sure reference to the will and nature of the Creator. This being, unquestionably gifted so largely, unquestionably the masterpiece of the visible creation, he turned loose into the world, wholly ignorant and uninstructed in all matters which respect both his Maker and his own future destiny. A careful father is anxious to give every information to his child, which may qualify him to play a useful and respectable part in society: and should any parent *systematically* withhold knowledge from his son, we should deem his plan an extraordinary mark of extreme folly. But the deist, on his own principles, is obliged to believe, that what we reasonably deem the very perfection of folly in man, is precisely the line of conduct adopted by a God of confessedly surpassing wisdom in regard to the whole intelligent human species. This wonderfully wise Being created man; and placed him, as a sovereign, in our nether world. But he left him in a state of profound ignorance, both as to the unity or plurality of his Creator, both as to the moral attributes of the Deity and his own consequent moral obligation. Not the slightest lesson did he give him: not the least care did he take, that he should well answer any supposable end of his creation. On the contrary, he industriously withheld from him all knowledge of his most impor-

\* See Paley's Natural Theology, *passim*.



tant concerns and interests. Nor did he merely refrain from giving him the requisite information. Some knowledge may not be imparted, because the acquisition of it is in our own power: and to communicate knowledge, which may be acquired by industry, is only to foster idleness. But this was not the case with the knowledge systematically denied to man, though knowledge of the last importance to him to possess. The knowledge was at once systematically denied to him; and the means of acquiring that knowledge, by any possible exertion of industry, were studiously withheld. Man was never taught, that there is one only God: and he is utterly unable to attain to any certainty respecting the unity of the Godhead. Man was never taught, that God is just and good and merciful: and he is utterly unable to demonstrate, that the moral attributes of God are justice and goodness and mercy. Man was never taught, what actions are pleasing to God: and he is utterly unable to prove, that virtue is more pleasing to him than vice. Much of this knowledge need not to have been revealed, had man been placed in a world differently constituted from the present: because if virtue were uniformly followed by reward and vice by punishment, if pain and misery and sickness were unknown except as the evident and unfailing penalty of injustice, if no instance of suffering or trouble in the case of a good man were ever known to occur, and if a removal from the present state of existence were never attended with horror and agony save in the case of a bad man; the character and will of God might then be as unerringly ascertained, as if he had formally declared them. But the truth is, that the world, in which man is actually placed, is a complete enigma, a tissue of jarring contradictions. Perplexed and distracted, he can arrive at no certainty: labour as he may, he is of necessity still tossed in endless doubtings. Yet, in such a world, the deist supposes man to be placed: not by babbling folly, careless whether an end be attained or not: but by consummate wisdom, which in every other instance carefully and effectually adapts the mean to the end.

To take up, with a full conviction of its truth, this extraordinary and paradoxical supposition, is not one of the least difficulties which attend upon deistical Infidelity; and many perhaps will think it a greater mark of credulity, to believe that an all-wise God has placed in the world his rational creature man without giving him the slightest instruction as to those points in which his welfare is immediately concerned, than to believe that an all-wise God has authoritatively communicated to his rational creature man that knowledge and information which may best and most certainly fit him to answer the moral ends of his creation.



### SECTION III.

#### THE DIFFICULTIES ATTENDANT UPON DEISTICAL INFIDELITY IN REGARD TO HISTORICAL MATTER OF FACT.

It has been so ordered by a wise and over-ruling Providence, that, in the case of various historical matters of fact, the deist is inevitably reduced to the alternative, either of *denying the fact itself*, or of *admitting that a revelation from God to man must have taken place*. If, on the one hand, he boldly denies the fact; then he unsettles the whole *rationale* of historical evidence, and brings himself (would he preserve the character of consistency) into a state of universal scepticism as to all past occurrences: if, on the other hand, he admits the fact; then he will find himself compelled to admit along with it the necessary concomitant fact of a divine revelation. So that, under this aspect of the question, the point will be, whether a man evinces a higher degree of credulity, by persuading himself that a recorded fact is absolutely false, notwithstanding it rests upon the very strongest historical evidence; or by believing the fact, and thence admitting its necessary consequence a revelation from heaven.

Many matters of this description might easily be adduced and commented upon: I shall however, for the sake of brevity, confine myself to a single remarkable case, as affording an apt specimen of the present mode of reasoning.

The case, which I shall produce, is the naked historical fact of *the general deluge*: and my position is, that *the deist must either deny this fact altogether, or admit the actual occurrence of a revelation from God to man*.

It might seem as if the school of unbelievers had anticipated the possibility of some such use being made of the fact in question: whence perhaps we may account for the zeal, with which, from time to time, they have wished wholly to set aside the fact. For, doubtless, if it could be satisfactorily shewn that the deluge *never* occurred, no argument of any description could be drawn from it. The proofs however of its actual occurrence are so strong and so multiplied and so decisive, that, if *this* fact be denied, we must forthwith close the volume both of history and of physiology: in history, we

must learn to believe nothing, whether near or remote ; in physiology, we must learn to disbelieve the very evidence of our senses.

Some of these proofs shall be briefly exhibited : and, when the absolute necessity of the fact has been thus established, we may then be allowed fairly and reasonably to draw from it the proposed inference.

I. The proofs are partly historical, partly physiological, and partly moral.

1. With respect to historical proof, I so designate the universal attestation of mankind to the alleged fact, that a general deluge once took place, and that all animated nature perished save a single family with those birds and beasts and reptiles which they were instrumental in preserving.

This universal attestation I call *a proof* : because, if *it* be deemed incapable of establishing a fact, there is an end of all historical evidence.

The circumstance of a general deluge is asserted by Moses. Now, when we consider the tremendous magnitude of such an event, and when we further consider that the Hebrew legislator has ventured to ascribe to it so comparatively recent a date as the year 2349 before the Christian era according to the chronology of the Hebrew Pentateuch, or the year 2939 before the same era according to the chronology of the Samaritan Pentateuch : when, I say, we consider these two points ; we may be morally sure, that, if the fact stood recorded in the Israelitish annals alone while the rest of mankind were quite ignorant of its occurrence, it must have been a mere fiction and could never have really happened. For, had an event of such a nature indeed taken place at the epoch fixed by Moses, it never could have been forgotten in so comparatively short a time by the posterity of the solely preserved family. Hence the ignorance of all the rest of mankind, save the Israelites, would have been proof presumptive, that the whole Hebrew narrative of the deluge was a palpable fabrication. Or again, if some few neighbouring nations only were acquainted with the fact, while the more remote nations including the bulk of mankind had never heard of it, the obvious presumption would then be, that no *general* deluge had occurred, though a *partial* and *local* inundation might have taken place, which had been exaggerated into a story of an *universal* flood with its present concomitants.

(1.) Such, I think, would have been the natural and reasonable inferences on either of those two suppositions. But, in truth, neither of the two suppositions is well founded.

So far from all mankind being ignorant of the alleged fact, save the Israelites alone; so far from the neighbouring nations only knowing it, conjunctively with the Israelites: there is scarcely a people on the face of the whole globe, to whom the fact is not perfectly familiar. Nor am I speaking of those modern nations, whether Pagan or Mohammedan, to whom the fact might have been circuitously conveyed through the medium of Christianity: I speak of ancient nations, who flourished long before the promulgation of the Gospel; and I speak of those modern nations, modern I mean in the persons of their present representatives, who plainly received their knowledge of the fact from remote primeval independent tradition. All mankind unite in attesting the same circumstance: and they all agree, with surprising uniformity, in their details. From north to south, and from east to west; in Europe, in Asia, in Africa, in America: the story of a general deluge never fails to present itself. A former world had attained to a height of daring wickedness. The gods were resolved to destroy it. A single pious family, with a sufficient number of birds and beasts and reptiles, were preserved in a large ship, while every thing else perished beneath the waters of an universal inundation. The family consisted of eight persons: an old man and his wife, his three sons and their wives. When the waters began to abate, they sent out a raven and a dove: and, when the deluge had sufficiently subsided, their ship came to land upon the summit of a lofty mountain. By their descendants the present world was gradually filled with inhabitants.\*

This, in substance, is the general tradition of all nations in every quarter of the globe. The story may be told more fully or less fully, more intermingled with fable or more free from fable: but still, under every modification, such is its universal drift and purport.

(2.) Nor does the tradition merely float down the stream of time in a state of vague subsistence: the facts, which it embraces, are embodied in the national mythology and religion of every people.

We are expressly assured, that the gods, whom the Gentiles worshipped, were illustrious men, who had flourished during the golden age or in the infancy of the world:† and agreeably

\* See Bryant's Anal. vol. ii. p. 195—251. Faber's Orig. of Pagan Idol. book iii. chap. 4. and Horæ Mosaic. book i. sect. 1. chap. 4. 2d edit.

† Hesiod. Oper. et dies. lib. i. ver. 120—125. August. de Civ. Dei. lib. iv. cap. 27. lib. viii. cap. 5. Cicer. Tusc. Disp. lib. i. cap. 12, 13. De nat. deor. lib. i. cap. 42. Jul. Firm. de error. prof. rel. cap. vi.

to this assurance, we invariably find a notion prevalent, that their principal divinity, the common father both of Gods and of men, was the parent of three sons among whom the whole earth was divided; that one of the forms of his consort was a ship; that, during a time when the waters overspread the face of all lands, he was inclosed within the womb of this mysterious vessel; that, thus confined, he floated upon the surface of a shoreless ocean; and that, at length, when the flood retired, he disembarked, planted the first vine, and transmitted every useful art and science to his posterity.\*

Such facts constituted the basis of the ancient Mysteries:† and, though they are sometimes told in a wild strain of fabulizing, they are always abundantly intelligible. For the sake of brevity, let a single instance only be produced from the mythology of Hindostan. *Satyavrata having built the ark, and the flood increasing, it was made fast to the peak of Nau-bandha with a cable of prodigious length. During the flood, Brahma or the creative power was asleep at the bottom of the abyss; while the generative powers of nature, or the great god Siva and the great goddess Isi, were reduced to their simplest elements; the latter assuming the shape of a ship's hull since typified by the Argha, and the former becoming the mast of the vessel. In this manner they were wafted over the deep, under the care and protection of Vishnou. When the waters had retired, the female power of nature appeared immediately, in the character of Capoteswari or the dove: and she was soon joined by her consort, in the shape of Capoteswara or the male dove.‡* On this legend it is quite superfluous to offer any explanatory observations: suffice it to say, that strong indeed must have been the recollections of the deluge, when its leading facts are thus systematically embodied in the popular mythology of every pagan nation.

Now whence could such an universal belief in a general deluge have arisen, if no such catastrophe had ever really happened? It is utterly incredible, that all mankind should have agreed in attesting the circumstance, if the circumstance itself had never occurred. This universal attestation then, on every principle of historical evidence, I shall venture once more to denominate *a proof* of the alleged fact: for it is a proof, which can never be invalidated by any rational process of discussion.

\* See Bryant's Anal. and Faber's Orig. of Pagan Idol. passim.

† Orig. of Pagan Idol. book v. chap. 6.

‡ Asiat. Research. vol. vi. p. 523.



2. The only plausible objection or rather difficulty, which could be fairly started, would be this. If an event of such terrific magnitude as the general deluge ever really took place, it must have left indelible marks of its ravages upon the coats of the earth. Hence, if no such marks can be traced, the language of nature contradicts the language of historical tradition: and the former, involving as it does naked tangible facts, must certainly be deemed more cogent than the latter.

(1.) Of this objection, did truth allow it to be started, I would readily acknowledge the force: but in reality, the language of nature, as decyphered by our best physiologists, instead of contradicting, perfectly agrees with the language of universal historical tradition.

"I am of opinion," says Mr. Cuvier, "with Mr. de Luc and Mr. Dolomieu, that, if there is any circumstance thoroughly established in geology, it is, that the crust of our globe has been subjected to a great and sudden revolution, the epoch of which cannot be dated much farther back than five or six thousand years; that this revolution had buried all the countries, which were before inhabited by men and by the other animals that are now best known; that the small number of individuals of men and other animals, that escaped from the effects of that great revolution, have since propagated and spread over the lands then newly laid dry; and, consequently, that the human race has only resumed a progressive state of improvement since that epoch, by forming established societies, raising monuments, collecting natural facts, and constructing systems of science and learning."\*

"The surface of the earth, which is inhabited by man," says Mr. Parkinson, "displays even at the present day, manifest and decided marks of the mechanical agency of violent currents of water. Nor is there a single stratum, that does not exhibit undeniable proofs of its having been broken, and even dislocated, by some tremendous power, which has acted with considerable violence on this planet, since the deposition of the strata of even the latest formation."†

(2.) Thus strongly does the very texture of the globe proclaim the occurrence of a great diluvian revolution, which overwhelmed a former race of men and animals, and from the effects of which only a small number of each escaped: nor does it less distinctly proclaim, that the revolution itself must have occurred at a comparatively recent era. Moses, accord-

\* Essay on the theory of the earth. § 34. p. 173, 174. 4th edit.

† Organic Remains of a former world, vol. iii. p. 454.

ing to the chronological numbers of the Hebrew Pentateuch, places it 4171 years anterior to the present day ;\* or, according to what I deem the preferable chronological numbers of the Samaritan Pentateuch, 4761 years anterior to the same time : Mr. Cuvier, drawing his inference from the observation of actual phenomena, pronounces, that its epoch cannot be dated much farther back than five or six thousand years.

The train of reasoning, through which he arrives at such a conclusion, is singularly curious and interesting.

“ By a careful investigation,” says he, “ of what has taken place on the surface of the globe, since it has been laid dry for the last time, and since its continents have assumed their present form (at least in such parts as are somewhat elevated above the level of the ocean,) it may be clearly seen, that this last revolution, and consequently the establishment of our existing societies, could not have been very ancient. This result is one of the best established, and least attended to, in rational zoology : and it is so much the more valuable, as it connects natural and civil history together in one uninterrupted series.

“ When we endeavour to estimate the quantity of effects, produced in a given time, by any causes still acting, by comparing them with the effects which these causes have produced since they began to operate, we may determine nearly the period at which their action commenced : which must necessarily be the same period, with that in which our continents assumed their present existing forms, or with that of the last retreat of the waters. It must have been since that last retreat of the waters, that the acclivities of our mountains have begun to disintegrate and to form slopes or *taluses* of the *debris* at their bottoms and upon their sides ; that our rivers have begun to flow in their present courses and to form alluvial depositions ; that our existing vegetation has begun to extend itself, and to form vegetable soil ; that our present cliffs, or steep sloping coasts have begun to be worn away by the waters of the sea ; that our actual downs or sand-hills have begun to be blown away by the winds : and, dating from the same epoch, colonies of the human race must have then begun, for the first or for the second time, to spread themselves and to form new establishments in places fitted by nature for their reception.

“ De Luc and Dolomieu have most carefully examined the progress of the formation of new grounds, by the collection of slime and sand washed down by the rivers : and, although

\* I write in the year 1823.

exceedingly opposed to each other on many points of the theory of the earth, they agree exactly on this. These formations augment very rapidly : they must have increased with the greatest rapidity at first, when the mountains furnished the greatest quantity of materials to the rivers : and yet their extent still continues to be extremely limited.

“The memoir of Mr. Dolomieu, respecting Egypt, tends to prove, that the tongue of land on which Alexander caused his famous commercial city to be built, did not exist in the days of Homer : because they were then able to navigate directly from the island of Pharos into the gulf, afterwards called *Lacus Mareotis* ; and this gulf, as indicated by Menelaus, was between fifteen and twenty leagues in length. Supposing this to be accurate, it has only required the lapse of nine hundred years, from the days of Homer to the time of Strabo, to bring matters to the situation described by the latter author, when that gulf was reduced to the state of a lake only six leagues long.

“It is a more certain fact, that since that time, a still greater change has taken place. The sands, which have been thrown up by the sea and the winds, have formed between the isle of Pharos and the site of ancient Alexandria, an isthmus more than four hundred yards broad, on which the modern city is now built. These collections of sand have also blocked up the nearest mouth of the Nile, and have reduced the lake Mareotis almost to nothing ; while, in the course of the same period, the Nile has deposited alluvial formations all along the rest of the coast. In the time of Herodotus, the coast of the Delta extended in a straight line, and is even represented in that direction in the maps constructed for the geography of Ptolemy ; but, since then, the coast has so far advanced as to have assumed a semicircular projection into the Mediterranean.

“We may learn in Holland and Italy, how rapidly the Rhine, the Po, and the Arno, since they have been confined within dykes, now elevate their beds, and push forward the alluvial grounds at their mouths toward the sea, forming long projecting promontories at their sides ; and it may be concluded from this assured fact, that these rivers have not required the lapse of many centuries to deposit the low alluvial plains through which they now flow.

“Many cities, which were flourishing sea-ports in well-known periods of history, are now several leagues inland ; and some have even been ruined by this change. The inhabitants of Venice at present find it exceedingly difficult to pre-



serve the lagunes, by which that once celebrated city is separated from the continent of Italy, from filling up : and there can be no doubt, that she will some day become united to the main land, in spite of every effort to preserve her insular situation.

“ We learn from Strabo, that Ravenna stood among lagunes in the time of Augustus, as Venice does now : but Ravenna is at present a league distant from the sea. Spina had been originally built by the Greeks on the sea-coast : but, in the time of Strabo, the sea was removed to the distance of ninety stadia. This city has been long since destroyed. Adria, which gave name to the Adriatic, was, somewhat more than twenty centuries ago, the chief port of that sea, from which it is now at the distance of six leagues. The Abbe Fortis has even produced strong evidence for believing, that the Euganean hills may have been islands at a period somewhat more remote.

“ Mr. de Prony, having been directed by the French government to examine and report upon the precautions which might be employed for preventing the devastations occasioned by the floods of the Po, ascertained, that this river has so greatly raised the level of its bottom since it was shut in by dykes, that its present surface is higher than the roofs of the houses in Ferrara. At the same time, the alluvial additions produced by this river have advanced so rapidly into the sea, that, by comparing old charts with the present state, the coast appears to have gained no less than fourteen thousand yards since the year 1604, giving an average of an hundred and eighty to two hundred feet yearly. The Adige and the Po are both at present higher than the intervening lands : and the only remedy for preventing the disasters, which are now threatened by their annual overflowings, would be to open new channels for the more ready discharge of their waters through the low lands which have been formed by their alluvial depositions.

“ Similar causes have produced similar effects along the branches of the Rhine and the Maese ; owing to which, all the richest districts of Holland have the frightful view of their great rivers held up by dikes, at the height of twenty or even thirty feet above the level of the land.

“ This formation and increase of new grounds, by alluvial depositions, proceeds with as much rapidity along the coasts of the North Sea as on those of the Adriatic. These additions can be easily traced in Friesland and Groningen, where the epoch of the first dikes, constructed by the Spanish governor, Gaspard Robles, is well known to have been in the



year 1570. An hundred years afterwards, the alluvial depositions had added in some places three quarters of a league of new land on the outside of these dikes: and the city of Groningen, partly built upon the ancient soil, which has no connection with the present sea (being a calcareous formation, in which the same species of shells are found as in the coarse limestone formations near Paris,) is only six leagues from the sea. The same phenomenon is as distinctly observable all along the coasts of East-Friesland and the countries of Bremen and Holstein, as the period, at which the new grounds were inclosed by dikes for the first time, is perfectly well known; and the extent, that has been gained since, can be easily measured. These new alluvial lands, left by the sea and the rivers, are of astonishing fertility: and they are so much the more valuable, as the ancient soil of these countries, being mostly covered by barren heaths and peat-mosses, is almost incapable of cultivation: so that the alluvial lands alone produce subsistence for the many populous cities, that have been built along these coasts since the middle age, and which probably might not have reached their present flourishing condition without the aid of these rich grounds which have been (as it were) created by the rivers, and to which they are continually making additions.

“The downs or sand-hills, which are thrown up by the sea upon low flat coasts when the bed of the sea happens to be composed of sand, have been already mentioned. Wherever human industry has not succeeded to fix these downs, they advance as securely and irresistibly upon the land as the alluvial formations from the rivers encroach upon the sea. In their progress inland, they push before them great pools of water, formed by the rain which falls on the neighbouring grounds, and which has no means of running off in consequence of the obstructions interposed by the downs. In several places they proceed with a frightful rapidity, overwhelming forests, houses, and cultivated fields, in their irresistible progress.

“Those upon the coast of the Bay of Biscay have overwhelmed a great number of villages, which are mentioned in the records of the middle age: and, even at present, in the single department of Landes, they threaten no fewer than ten with almost inevitable destruction. One of these, named *Mimigan*, has been in danger for the last fifteen years from a sand-hill of more than sixty feet in perpendicular height, which obviously continues to advance.

“In the year 1802, the pools overwhelmed five farm-houses belonging to the village of St. Julian. They have long cover-

ed up an ancient Roman road, leading from Bourdeaux to Bayonne, which could still be seen about thirty years ago, where the waters were lower than they are now. The river Adour, which is known to have formerly passed Old Boucat to join the sea at Cape Breton, is now turned to the distance of more than 2400 yards.

“Mr. Bremontier, who made several extensive works to stop the progress of these downs, estimated it at sixty feet yearly, and in some places at seventy-two feet. According to this calculation, it would require two thousand years to enable them to arrive at Bourdeaux: and, on the same data, they have taken somewhat more than four thousand years to reach their present situation.

“The *Turbaries*, or peat-mosses, which have been formed so generally in the northern parts of Europe by the accumulation of the remains of *sphagnum* and other aquatic mosses, afford another mean of estimating the time which has elapsed since the last retreat of the sea, from our present continents. These mosses increase in height in proportions which are determinate in regard to each. They surround and cover up the small knolls, upon which they are formed; and several of these knolls have been covered over within the memory of man. In other places, the mosses gradually descend along the valleys, extending downward like the glaciers: but these latter melt away every year at their lower edges, while the mosses are not stopped by any thing whatever in their regular increase. By sounding their depth down to the solid ground, we may form some estimate of their antiquity; and it may be asserted respecting these mosses, as as well as respecting the downs, that they do not derive their origin from an indefinitely ancient epoch.

“The same observations may be made in regard to the slips or fallings, which sometimes take place at the bottom of all steep slopes in mountainous regions, and which are still very far from having covered these over. But, as no precise measures of their progress have hitherto been applied, we shall not insist upon them at any greater length.

“From all that has been said, it may be seen, that nature every where distinctly informs us, that the commencement of the present order of things cannot be dated at a very remote period.\*

3. With the language of nature and with the general tradi-

\* Essays on the theory of the earth. § 31, 32. p. 135—242.

tions of all nations, the evidence, afforded by what I have called *a moral proof*, will still be found exactly to accord.

(1.) As all the nations upon the face of the earth, which possess any records or ancient traditions, unanimously declare, that an universal deluge once took place, and that society recommenced from the epoch of that grand revolution: so every account which has come down to us of the progress of civilization, with its concomitant arts and sciences, tends to demonstrate the comparative newness of social order and thence incidentally its commencement from some remarkable epoch of no stupendously remote antiquity.

On the supposition, that the general deluge really took place, and that a single family alone was preserved in the midst of surrounding destruction; it is easy to conceive, what in lapse of time would be the almost certain consequence of such an event. For a season, mankind would remain together, and would industriously preserve and cultivate that knowledge which had been saved from the wreck of a former world. But, ere long, increase of numbers would produce emigration: and emigration would take place in every direction from the central spot, which was first inhabited. Those who remained together in the originally established society, and those who had the good fortune to plant themselves in rich and fertile countries, retaining the arts and sciences derived from their antediluvian forefathers, would gradually form civilized and well-politied communities. But those who emigrated in small bodies, and who plunged into the depths of trackless forests or fixed themselves in hopelessly barren districts, would soon sink into a state of ignorance and barbarism: for, either the labour of clearing the ground would so occupy them as to preclude much cultivation of mind, or an adoption of the pastoral or hunting life would prove equally unfavourable to the preservation and diffusion of knowledge. Thus, by the very necessity of things, mankind would in a very short time be distributed into the two classes of the civilized and uncivilized.

Yet so great are the advantages of knowledge and union, that, although barbarous nations may often have made successful inroads into the territories of civilized nations, there is a natural tendency in civilization to spread itself and in the end to prevail over and exterminate barbarism. Hence, after a certain number of years, civilization gradually extending and barbarism gradually contracting its limits, the inevitable result must be the universal diffusion of the light of knowledge. I mean not to say, that various impediments may not, from time to time, obstruct the progress of civilization, or that once civi-



lized nations may not occasionally retrograde to at least comparative barbarism : but this I will venture to say, that, in the natural course of things, civilization on the whole must ever be in a state of increase, and barbarism on the whole must ever be in a state of decrease.

(2.) With this view of the matter, all history down to the present time, perfectly agrees.

Many tribes and nations now exist in the variously graduated state of barbarism, from defective civilization down to absolute brutal savageness. Not more than some fifteen or sixteen centuries ago, the ancestors of the highly polished and civilized Europeans were still in the barbarous state, though they had emerged from the condition of complete savages. At a still more distant period, even after every allowance has been made for Grecian vanity, many of the nations, which touched upon the various Hellenic republics and colonies, were in the strictly proper sense of the word, barbarians. If we carry our researches yet farther back, we find the forefathers of the Greeks themselves in the very same barbaric condition as that, with which they afterwards indiscriminately reproached all their neighbours. In short, whenever the character of a very ancient lawgiver is delineated, the reclamation of his people either from savage or from barbarous life never fails to be insisted upon as a leading feature of his character. Yet, while such is the unvaried tenor of history and tradition, it is always acknowledged, that civilization has, from the very earliest times, prevailed in the East : nor is it less acknowledged, that the east was the aboriginal cradle of the human race immediately after that terrible revolution which stands more or less distinctly recorded in the annals of almost every nation upon the face of the globe. Barbarism then is not a state of nature, but a state of degeneracy. The East preserved, what the primeval emigrants from the East lost by the labours and difficulties attending upon their locomotion : and the East gradually communicated the sacred deposit to those who had forfeited it. Egypt and Phenicia borrowed from Chaldea and Assyria : Greece derived her civilization from Egypt and Phenicia : Rome and Italy were largely indebted to Greece : the Gothic conquerors of the West received the torch of knowledge from the vanquished Empire of Rome : and now, by navigation and colonization and an almost perpetual intercourse with the most widely separated nations, their descendants are rapidly carrying it in every possible direction.

(3.) What then is the plain inference from these well known and familiar facts ?



Doubtless it is this: that *the population of the world is comparatively recent.*

For, had the world begun to be peopled at some immensely distant period, or had the human race existed from all eternity though the individual man be liable to death, civilization and good polity, with the arts and sciences in their train, must many ages ago have diffused themselves over the whole habitable globe; the savage and barbaric states must long since have become extinct; and, even on what is called *the doctrine of chances*, every modern invention must already have been ancient in the days of our remote ancestors. Not more sure is the physical progress of alluvial depositions and encroaching sands, than the moral progress of knowledge and of civilization. Each alike proclaims the recent population of the earth. But what shall we place before the commencement of this recent population? The voice of all nations, and the indelible marks imprinted upon the globe itself, concur in declaring, that the recent population of the present world was immediately preceded by an awful diluvian revolution, from which a few individuals only of men and animals were suffered to escape.

II. Such are the proofs, upon which the fact of *the universal deluge* is firmly established: nor do I see, how any man can resist such evidence, unless he will throw aside all history, resolutely shut his eyes against the researches of physiology, and boldly controvert the necessity of moral testimony. The *fact* therefore of *the universal deluge* I consider as demonstrated: whence we may fairly claim to argue from it, as we would do from any other established fact. On these reasonable principles, I may be allowed to employ it as a medium of proving the additional fact, of *a direct intercourse between man and his Creator*, or, in other words, of *a revelation of God's purposes to his creature man.*

The established fact is, that an universal deluge took place not more than five or six millenaries ago; from which a few individuals only of men and animals, the progenitors of the present race of men and animals, effected their escape.

If then these few individuals only, human and bestial, effected their escape; the question is, how *they* happened to effect it, while the great mass of their respective fellows perished?

To such a question it is unanimously replied by the voice of all nations, that the pious head of a single pious family constructed an immense ship, and that in this vessel were preserved

those individuals of men and animals by whose descendants the present world has been replenished.

Now here another question arises. If a ship were constructed and used for this special purpose, the person, who so constructed and used it, must have foreseen the approaching deluge. But man, naturally, possesses not foreknowledge.—Whence then did the builder of the ship derive that prescience, by which he foresaw and provided against the approaching deluge?

It is not easy to conceive, what reply can be given to this question, save what is doubtless the true one. The builder of the ship must have derived his prescience from an immediate intercourse with God. But, if this be admitted (and surely we have here a knot, which nothing save the intervention of a Deity, can untie;) the fact of a *direct intercourse between man and his Creator*, or, in other words, the fact of a *revelation of God's purposes to his creature man*, is fully and incontrovertibly established.

Against such a conclusion I see not what can be urged, save either the one or the other of the two following solutions of the difficulty.

It may be said, that the deluge, though universal in one sense of the word, yet did not cover the tops of all the highest hills; and that, upon their summits, certain individuals, human and bestial, preserved themselves from destruction.

Or it may be admitted, that the deluge was strictly universal; while it may be contended, that the individuals in question fortunately saved themselves on board of a ship, which, without any necessary revelation from heaven, had been previously built just as many other ships might have been previously built.

Neither of these solutions, I fear, will untie the knot: they shall, however, be considered in their order.

1. Let us first suppose, that the deluge did not cover the tops of the highest mountains, and that certain individuals of each *genus* preserved themselves upon their summits. What will be the result of this supposition? It will, I presume be the following.

Though many men and many animals would perish, many men and many animals in every quarter of the globe would escape: for, as the summits of the mountains would be open to all, we may be quite sure, that great numbers would eagerly seize such an opportunity of self-preservation. Had this then been the mode of escape afforded to men and animals, it is perfectly clear, that no tradition of any escape effected

through the medium of a ship could have been in existence. The accounts of the several nations of the earth would indeed have so far agreed, that their respective ancestors had saved themselves upon the tops of their own territorial mountains: but their accounts could never have agreed in the single striking circumstance, that the preservation both of men and animals was effected by the instrumentality of a large ship built for that special purpose, if all the while no such circumstance had ever occurred.

Upon the supposition before us, it is abundantly manifest, that traditions of the deluge must have exhibited a totally different aspect from what they do at present. In some chance country, we might possibly have heard of an individual who escaped in a ship: but the *generally prevailing* account would certainly have been, that men and animals took refuge on the tops of the mountains, which remained dry while the plains were inundated.

2. Let us next suppose, that, although the deluge was strictly universal, yet the mode, in which individual men and animals escaped, was not in a ship specially built for the purpose by reason of a divine revelation, but in a ship which (like many other ships) had been accidentally built in the ordinary course of war or traffic. Now what will be the result of this supposition? It will, I apprehend, be the following.

If one family thus escaped, there is no assignable reason why many other families might not equally have escaped. Hence, under such circumstances, though tradition would have made a ship the medium of preservation, it would have told the thousand escapes in a thousand different manners.

But this is not the fact. In every quarter of the globe, the matter is related with surprizing uniformity. We are invariably told, not that many families, but that a single family alone, escaped; that this family consisted of eight persons; that the head of it was the father of three sons; and that from these three sons descended all the nations of the present world. It is true indeed, that, with a not unnatural vanity, every people has delighted to claim the father of the preserved family as their own peculiar countryman and to place the appulse of the ship upon some lofty mountain in their own peculiar territory: but still, in the fact that *only a single family was saved*, all nations agree; and the palpable circumstance, that the East was the cradle of mankind and the centre whence every post-diluvian emigration took place, clearly demonstrates that the ship can only have come to land in the continent of Asia.

I may add, that the supposition before us does not at all account for a matter, which involves no slight degree of difficulty.

The progenitors of the present existing birds and beasts must have been preserved from the general deluge, as well as the ancestors of the present existing race of mankind. Now the testimony of history and the researches of geology agree in declaring, that the deluge was not more *a great* than a *SUB-DEN revolution*.\* If then man received no warning from heaven of its approach, and if he merely fled to such ships as had previously and accidentally been constructed; how happened it, that the various *genera* of birds and beasts and reptiles, which are now in actual existence, were preserved no less than man? Is it likely, that there would be a curious research after land-animals and a painful endeavour to take alive the several tribes of birds which wing their airy way through the midst of heaven, while the waters were rapidly rising and threatening immediate destruction? Or, if any such extraordinary efforts should have been made, is it possible that they could have been crowned with success? Nay, even granting the rise of the waters to have been gradual, even granting it to have afforded sufficient time to catch every variety of animals; would man, if left to himself, have been anxious to preserve noxious creatures? Would he have painfully saved the lion, the tiger, the bear, the serpent? Would he have been careful to preserve those many smaller animals; which, though not formidable to him as combatants, are troublesome or destructive to his property, and which therefore he now incessantly labours to exterminate? The present supposition is clearly quite insufficient to account for the fact of *the existence of animals as they now exist*, notwithstanding the certain occurrence of the deluge at a comparatively recent period. Their progenitors could not have been collected together in order to embarkation, without a previous knowledge of the approaching flood on the part of their collector. But this previous knowledge he could not have had, save by a divine communication. Therefore a divine communication must have taken place: otherwise, the progenitors of our present birds and beasts and reptiles could not have been preserved.

3. Thus we are finally brought to the very same conclusion as before.

Admit the fact of that *great and sudden revolution*, which, according to Mr. Cuvier, is *a circumstance in geology most thoroughly established*, and *the epoch of which cannot be dated much farther back than five or six thousand years*: admit, I say, this fact; and you must inevitably admit the additional

\* Cuvier's Essay on the theory of the earth. § 34. p. 174.



fact also, that *a revelation of God's purposes to his creature man has assuredly taken place as we find it recorded in Holy Scripture.*

On the other hand, deny the fact of *the deluge*; and you must then run counter to the testimony both of universal history and of strictly corresponding geology, thus shaking all moral evidence to its very basis, and thus introducing a complete uncertainty as to every past event both ancient and modern.

Which of these two involves a greater difficulty, *an admission of the historical fact of the deluge or a denial of it in the face of the strongest and most varied evidence*, does not, I think, require any prolonged discussion.

## SECTION IV.

### THE DIFFICULTIES ATTENDANT UPON DEISTICAL INFIDELITY IN REGARD TO ACTUALLY ACCOMPLISHED PROPHECY.

THE same, or (if possible) still greater, difficulties attend upon deistical Infidelity in regard to actually accomplished prophecy.

Political sagacity may sometimes anticipate events, on the mere principle of cause and effect : but the sagacity can penetrate to no very great distance of time ; it is uncertain in its operation, even when causes are accurately known ; and if the causes of future events be altogether unknown, its operation wholly ceases.

Prophetic sagacity, on the other hand, is so totally different from political sagacity, that, on no rational grounds, can the two be ever confounded together. Various instances may be easily produced, in which matters most remotely distant in point of time have been accurately foretold, in which such unerring certainty is exhibited that not a failure can be detected even in the most minute circumstance, and in which the prophet must clearly have been ignorant of all those political causes which in the course of God's providence were destined to bring about the predicted effects.

Such being the case, we have an undoubted fact to explain. A mere man, like ourselves, authoritatively and confidently declares, that a particular tissue of events will assuredly come to pass. His word is accurately accomplished : and yet, so far as his own natural powers were concerned, he possessed no greater facility of developing futurity than any other man. This is the fact to be accounted for : and, as the fact itself is indisputable, we certainly have a right to expect, either that the infidel on his own principles should give a satisfactory solution of it, or that he should renounce his principles as clogged with too many difficulties to be rationally tenable.

To run through the whole volume of prophecy, would far exceed my present limits : I must, therefore, as in the recent case of the historical fact of the deluge, select some one special prediction, which may serve as a specimen of the mode of reasoning from accomplished prophecy in general.

The prediction, selected for this purpose, shall be that of Moses respecting the future condition of a people, who, at the time of its delivery, were on the eve of victoriously taking possession of the land of Palestine : and I the rather select this prediction, both on account of its remote antiquity, for it was uttered fifteen centuries before it began to be accomplished ; and on account of the demonstration, which, by a necessary consequence, it affords to the divine authority of the Levitical Dispensation.

I. In a somewhat abbreviated form, the prophecy in question runs as follows :

“ It shall come to pass, if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God, to observe to do all his commandments and his statutes which I command thee this day ; that all these curses shall come upon thee, and overtake thee— And they shall be upon thee for a sign and for a wonder, and upon thy seed for ever.

“ The Lord shall bring a nation against thee from far, from the end of the earth, as the eagle flieth ; a nation whose tongue thou shalt not understand ; a nation of fierce countenance, which shall not regard the person of the old, nor shew favour to the young. And he shall eat the fruit of thy cattle and the fruit of thy land, until thou be destroyed : which also shall not leave thee either corn, wine, or oil, or the increase of thy kine, or flocks of thy sheep, until he have destroyed thee. And he shall besiege thee in all thy gates, until thy high and fenced walls come down, wherein thou trustedst, throughout all thy land : and he shall besiege thee in all thy gates throughout all thy land, which the Lord thy God hath given thee.

“ And thou shalt eat the fruit of thine own body, the flesh of thy sons and of thy daughters which the Lord thy God hath given thee, in the siege and in the straitness wherewith thine enemies shall distress thee—The tender and delicate woman among you, which would not adventure to set the sole of her foot upon the ground for delicateness and tenderness, her eye shall be evil toward the husband of her bosom, and toward her son, and toward her daughter, and toward her young one that cometh out from between her feet, and toward her children which she shall bear : for she shall eat them for want of all things secretly in the siege and straitness, wherewith thine enemy shall distress thee in thy gates—

“ Then the Lord will make thy plagues wonderful, and the plagues of thy seed, even great plagues and of long continuance, and sore sicknesses, and of long continuance—

“ And it shall come to pass, that as the Lord rejoiced over

you to do you good and to multiply you ; so the Lord will rejoice over you to destroy you and to bring you to nought : and ye shall be plucked from the land, whither thou goest to possess it.

“And the Lord shall scatter thee among all people, from the one end of the earth even to the other—

“And among these nations shalt thou find no ease, neither shall the sole of thy foot have rest : but the Lord shall give thee there a trembling heart, and failing of eyes, and sorrow of mind : and thy life shall hang in doubt before thee : and thou shalt fear day and night, and shalt have none assurance of thy life. In the morning thou shalt say, Would God it were even ! and at even thou shalt say, Would God it were morning ! for the fear of thine heart wherewith thou shalt fear, and for the sight of thine eyes which thou shalt see.

“And the Lord shall bring thee into Egypt again with ships, by the way whereof I spake unto thee, Thou shalt see it no more again : and there ye shall be sold unto your enemies for bond-men and bond-women, and no man shall buy you—

“And thou shalt become an astonishment, a proverb, and a by-word, among all nations, whither the Lord shall lead thee—

“So that the generation to come of your children that shall rise up after you, and the stranger that shall come from a far land, shall say ;—What meaneth the heat of this great anger ? Then men shall say ; Because they have forsaken the covenant of the Lord God of their fathers, which he made with them when he brought them forth out of the land of Egypt :—the Lord rooted them out of their land in anger and in wrath, and in great indignation, and cast them into another land, as it is this day.”\*

II. Thus runs the prophecy : a prophecy which cannot be said to be dark, and obscure, and ambiguous, and unintelligible ; but which is delivered in terms plain, simple, and perspicuous to the meanest intellect.

1. Its minute accomplishment in every particular, however that accomplishment is to be accounted for, is not a matter of doubt, or dispute, or speculation : on the contrary, it is a naked matter of fact, which is recorded by history, and which even at the present day we behold with our own eyes. Familiarly does it meet us, wherever we direct our steps : and, extraordinary as it is in itself, the very circumstance of its familiarity, like the periodical rising and setting of the sun, causes it to produce the less vivid effect upon our imagination

\* Deut. xxviii. xxix.



and the less forcibly to arrest our languid attention. Among the heedless and the inconsiderate, even the notoriety of the fact tends to diminish its impressiveness.

Yet, while the general accomplishment of the prophecy is seen and acknowledged, its minute accomplishment in a great variety of particulars is not always equally attended to ; though such is eminently the matter, which best serves for the basis of an invincibly conclusive argument. That the full weight of this remarkable circumstance may be felt and perceived, let us consider the prediction in all its leading points, article by article.

(1.) Moses begins with foretelling, that the threatened curses, when they overtake the wretched Israelites, shall be religiously viewed as a sign and a wonder : and he concludes with declaring, that, when men should behold their strange and unparalleled condition, they would be stirred up by curiosity to inquire into the grounds and reasons of it ; intimating at the same time, that the never-failing answer would be, that these calamities were judicial. The Lord rooted them out of their land in anger, and in wrath, and in great indignation ; and cast them into another land, as it is this day.

Such, accordingly, is the precise aspect under which these curses are now beheld by all nations : such is the invariable solution which is given of the phenomenon. It is universally taught and believed, that the Jews labour under the special curse of God. Their troubles are not viewed as a matter of ordinary occurrence, which may reasonably deserve and attract little attention : but they are considered as something out of the common course of nature ; and they are contemplated as an awful indication of the divine displeasure. According to the prophecy, this opinion, whether justly founded as the Christian believes, or unjustly founded, as the infidel imagines ; yet, at all events, as a simple fact, this opinion is to be generally entertained : and, in the accomplishment of the prophecy, this opinion always has been entertained.

(2.) The agent, that in the first instance inflicts these troubles upon the Jews, is described, as a nation of a fierce countenance, a nation distant in point of locality from Palestine, a nation whose language should be unintelligible to the sufferers : and this agent is represented, as besieging them in a fortified town of extraordinary strength, and as completely succeeding in his enterprise notwithstanding the confidence which they should place in their lofty and well-defended towers.

Remarkable, though perfectly familiar to every student of history, is the accomplishment of this particular also. With the

several languages of their immediate neighbours, the Jews were not unacquainted : for the Hebrew, the Phenician, the Syriac, the Chaldee, and the Arabic, are all dialects of one and the same primitive tongue : but the Latin which was spoken by the Romans, and the various barbaric western languages which were spoken by their auxiliaries, were utterly unknown to the Jews as a nation. From far distant Italy came this people of a proverbially fierce countenance : and the strong fortifications of Jerusalem, in which the besieged obstinately placed their trust, and which excited the admiration even of Titus himself, were unable to defend them in the day of trouble.

(3.) The horrors of the blockade are prophetically announced to be so great, that even delicate women, while they grudged every morsel to their husbands and adult children, should mercilessly slaughter and devour their own infants.

I need scarcely repeat the often told and well known facts recorded by the Jewish historian Josephus. Such was the scarcity produced by the siege, that the scanty morsel was greedily snatched by wives from the very mouths of their husbands, by sons from the mouths of their fathers, by mothers from the mouths of their infants.\* Nor was this the worst misery, to which they were reduced ; a still more dreadful portent was necessary to the accomplishment of the prophecy. That portent was the unutterable abomination of a worse than Thyestean banquet : a woman of high rank, impelled by the fury of raging hunger, slew and devoured her own sucking child.†

(4.) The troubles, which should come upon the Jews, are foretold to be at once great in extent and long in continuance.

Such, accordingly, they have been. Affecting the whole nation both generally and individually, they have continued without remission for the space of more than seventeen centuries.

(5.) It is further predicted, that this extraordinary people should not only be brought to great and lasting misery ; but that they should likewise be violently plucked from the land, which, when the prophecy was delivered, they were on the point of occupying as conquerors.

Here again we cannot but observe the exact completion of the oracle. Instead of being merely conquered and subjugat-

\* Joseph. de bell. Jud. lib. v. c. 10. § 3. p. 1245. lib. vi. c. 3. § 3. p. 1274. edit. Hudson. cited by Bp. Newton.

† Ibid. lib. vi. c. 3. § 4. cited by Bp. Newton.

ed, the general fate of other nations attacked by the Romans, it was the harder lot of the Jews to be torn from their native country and on pain of death to be prohibited from setting foot upon its soil.\*

(6.) Nor were the Jews to be simply transplanted, like colonists, from Palestine into some other region, which might better suit the policy or convenience of the victors: it is additionally foretold, that the Lord would scatter them among all people, from the one end of the earth even to the other.

This remarkable fact lies open to universal notice. Where is the region,\* in which the dispersed children of Israel are not to be found? Plucked violently from their own land, they meet us alike in Europe, Asia, Africa, and America.

(7.) Thus widely scattered, they were further destined to find no ease among the nations whose territories should receive them: but their standing characteristics should be a trembling heart, and failing of eyes, and sorrow of mind, and a perpetual anxiety even respecting life itself.

For the exact accomplishment of the present particular, we may confidently appeal to simple matter of fact. The description could not have been more vivid, had it been written in the present day, instead of many ages before the predicted dispersion of the house of Israel.

(8.) It is added, that, at the time of their desolation, many of the Jews should be sold as slaves into Egypt; and yet, so little should they be valued, or so slight should be the care taken of them, that, comparatively speaking, no man should buy them.

The circumstance here announced is remarkable, on account of its minuteness: nor is it less remarkable on account of its accurate completion. When Jerusalem was taken by Titus, the captives above seventeen years of age were sent bound, in great numbers, to the works in Egypt; and those under seventeen years of age were sold as slaves: but so little care was taken of them, that eleven thousand perished for want. And, at a subsequent period, after their last overthrow by Adrian, many thousands of them were sold: while those, who from their inferior quality would fetch no price, were transported into Egypt, where they either perished through famine and shipwreck, or were barbarously massacred by the inhabitants.†

\* Justin Martyr. *Apol.* i. p. 71. Euseb. *Eccles. Hist.* lib. iv. c. 6. Tertull. *Apol.* c. 21. Hieron. in *Isai.* c. vi. b. 65. in *Dan.* c. ix. p. 1117. cited by Bp. Newton.

† Joseph de bell. *Jud.* lib. vi. c. 9. § 2. p. 1291. Hieron. in *Zachar.* c. xi. vol. iii. p. 1774, cited by Bp. Newton.



(9.) The prophecy finally declares, that the dispersed Jews should become an astonishment, a proverb, and a by-word, among all nations, whither the Lord should lead them.

Of this unhappy people, such has now been notoriously the condition during the space of many centuries. That Christians should have viewed them with detestation, as the murderers of the promised Messiah, may not perhaps be a matter of much wonder. But there is no particular natural reason why, among the intolerant Mohammedans, they should be more a proverb and a by-word than any other unbelievers in the Koran : and it is wholly unaccountable on common principles, why they should be viewed in the very same degraded light by pagan nations. Yet so it has ever been : and so, in a great degree, it still is. How should we expect, *by any reasoning a priori*, that they would be trodden down of the heathen world, who never heard of the Saviour? Behold the Hindoo, at this day, punishing the Jew, without knowing the crime of which he has been guilty.\*

2. Such has been the accomplishment of a prophecy, delivered fifteen centuries before the commencement of the predicted desolation : and, in connection with it, we shall find it not uninteresting to hear the sentiments of the Jews themselves respecting their present depressed condition.

“Soon after the establishment of Christianity,” says one of their writers, “the Jewish nation, dispersed since the second destruction of its temple, had totally disappeared. By the light of the flames which devoured the monuments of its ancient splendour, the conquerors beheld a million of victims dead or expiring on their ruins. The hatred of the enemies of that unfortunate nation raged longer than the fire which had consumed its temple : active and relentless, it still pursues and oppresses them in every part of the globe over which they are scattered. Their persecutors delight in their torments too much to seal their doom by a general decree of proscription, which would at once put an end to their burdensome and painful existence. It seems, as if they were allowed to survive the destruction of their country, only to see the most odious and calumnious imputations laid to their charge, to stand as the constant object of the grossest and most shocking injustice, to be as a mark for the insulting finger of scorn, and as a sport to the most inveterate hatred : it seems, as if their doom was incessantly to suit all the dark and bloody purposes which can be suggested by human malignity, supported by ig-

\* Buchanan's Christian Researches in Asia. p. 297, 298.



norance and fanaticism. Weighed down by taxes, and forced to contribute more than Christians for the support of society, they had hardly any of the rights which it gives. If a destructive scourge happened to spread havoc among the inhabitants of a country, the Jews had poisoned the springs; or those men, cursed by heaven, had nevertheless incensed it by their prayers, against the nation which they were supposed to hate. Did sovereigns want pecuniary assistance to carry on their wars? The Jews were compelled to give up those riches, in which they sought some consolation against the oppressing sense of their abject condition: as a reward for their sacrifices, they were expelled from the state which they had supported, and afterwards recalled, to be stripped again. Compelled to wear exteriorly the badges of their abject state, they were every where exposed to the insults of the vilest populace. When from his solitary retreat an enthusiastic hermit had preached the crusades to the nations of Europe, and when a part of its inhabitants left their country, to moisten with their blood the plains of Palestine; the knell of promiscuous massacre tolled before the alarm-bell of war. Millions of Jews were then murdered, to glut the pious rage of the crusaders. It was by tearing the entrails of their brethren, that these warriors sought to deserve the protection of heaven. Skulls of men and bleeding hearts were offered as holocausts, on the altars of that God, who has no pleasure even in the blood of the innocent lamb: and ministers of peace were thrown into a holy enthusiasm by these bloody sacrifices. It is thus, that Basil, Treves, Coblentz, and Cologne, became human shambles. It is thus, that upwards 400,000 victims of all ages and of both sexes, lost their lives at Cesarea and Alexandria.

“ And is it after they have experienced such treatment, that they are reproached with their vices? Is it, after being for eighteen centuries the sport of contempt, that they are reproached with being no longer alive to it? Is it, after having so often glutted with their blood the thirst of their persecutors, that they are held out as enemies to other nations? Is it, when they have been bereft of all means to mollify the hearts of their tyrants, that indignation is roused, if now and then they cost a mournful look towards the ruins of their temple, towards their country, where formerly happiness crowned their peaceful days, free from the cares of ambition and of riches?

“ Since the light of philosophy began to dawn over Europe, our enemies have ceased to satisfy their revenge with the sacrifice of our lives. Jews are no longer seen, who generously refusing to bend under the yoke of intolerance, were led with

solemn pomp to the fatal pile. But, although the times of these barbarous executions are past long ago, although the hearts of sovereigns are now strangers to this cruelty; yet slavery itself and prejudices are still the same. By what crimes have we then deserved this furious intolerance? What is our guilt? Is it in that generous constancy which we have manifested in defending the laws of our fathers? But this constancy ought to have entitled us to the admiration of all nations, and it has only sharpened against us the daggers of persecution. Braving all kinds of torments, the pangs of death, the still more terrible pangs of life, we long have withstood the impetuous torrent of time, sweeping indiscriminately in its course nations, religions, and countries. What is become of those celebrated empires, whose very name still excites our admiration, by the ideas of splendid greatness attached to them, and whose power embraced the whole surface of the known globe? They are only remembered as monuments of the vanity of human greatness. Rome and Greece are no more: their descendants, mixed with other nations, have lost even the traces of their origin; while a population of a few millions of men, so often subjugated, stands the test of thirty revolving centuries, and the fiery ordeal of thirteen centuries of persecution! We still preserve laws which were given to us in the first days of the world, in the infancy of nature! The last followers of a religion which had embraced the universe, have disappeared these fifteen centuries; and our temples are still standing! We alone have been spared by the indiscriminating hand of time, like a column left standing amidst the wreck of worlds and the ruins of nature! The history of this people connects present times with the first ages of the world, by the testimony which it bears of the existence of those early periods: it begins at the cradle of mankind, and its remnants are likely to be preserved to the very day of universal destruction. All men, whatever may be their opinions, and the party which they have adopted: whether they suppose, that the will of God is to maintain the people, which he has chosen: whether they consider that constancy which characterizes the Jews, as a reprehensible obstinacy; or, lastly, if they believe in a God, who, regarding all religions with equal complacency, needs no other wonders to exemplify his greatness, but the incessant and magnificent display of the beauties of nature; all, if their minds are susceptible of appreciating virtue and tried firmness, will not refuse their just admiration to that unshaken constancy unparalleled in the annals of any nation.”\*

\* An appeal to the justice of kings and nations, cited in Transactions of the Parisian Sanhedrim. p. 64.

III. We have now seen both the prophecy and its minute accomplishment: we have next to consider the train of reasoning, which obviously and naturally springs from them.

On the one hand, then, we have a very ancient prophecy, not couched in dark and ambiguous terms, but perfectly plain and intelligible: a prophecy, which is contained in the sacred books of the Jews, though it explicitly sets forth their own condemnation; a prophecy, universally believed by them, from generation to generation, to have been uttered by their great legislator, Moses, more than fourteen centuries before the Christian era; a prophecy, which, on every sound principle of historical evidence, the infidel himself cannot but allow to have been in existence long anterior to the dispersion of the Jews first by Titus, and afterwards by Adrian.\*

On the other hand, we have, partly recorded in history, and partly at this very moment taking place even under our own eyes, a most minute and exact accomplishment of the prophecy: so minute and exact indeed, that it does not merely correspond with the prophecy in some vague and general outlines, but agrees with it in a vast number of separate and independent particulars.

This, whatever we may think of it, is at least the naked and indisputable matter of fact: on the one hand we have a prophecy, confessedly delivered long before its accomplishment; and, on the other hand, we have its accomplishment so marked and decided, that the circumstance of an exact completion cannot possibly be controverted.

So stands the fact: the only question therefore is, how we are to account for it.

The believer, whether Jew or Christian, conceiving himself to have a knot which the Deity alone can untie, finds the solution of the problem in a divine revelation. God only can evolve the roll of futurity: but the roll of futurity has here been evolved, even to a considerable number of very minute particulars: therefore God, speaking by the mouth of Moses, has evolved that roll.

Thus reasons the believer upon an indisputable matter of fact, which alike presents itself to the attention of all mankind. But then, if his reasoning be admitted as just, the divine authority of the Levitical Dispensation, with its whole train of con-

\* It may be briefly remarked, that the Samaritan Pentateuch and the Greek version of the Seventy, afford a collateral evidence to the genuineness and high antiquity of the prophecy of Moses: but, in truth, I know not, that any infidel writer has ever ventured to deny its priority to its accomplishment.



comitant circumstances, follows immediately, as a necessary consequence. For, if God spake by Moses, then was Moses a true prophet, and not a base impostor; and, if Moses were a true prophet inspired by God, then the code of religion, which he delivered to the Israelites, was not a politico-sacerdotal fraud, but a genuine revelation from heaven.

What then is to be done by the infidel: and how is he to account for the naked fact of the accomplishment of the prophecy, so as to evade the necessity of calling in the aid of inspiration?

I am unable to form any idea to myself of more than two possible modes of attempted solution.

1. The first is, that Moses, being endowed with a large share of political sagacity, foresaw, with the keen eye of a profound statesman who ventures to predict effects from well-known existing causes, that the Israelites being a comparatively weak people, would sooner or later be conquered and dispersed by some more powerful nation.

With respect to this theory, it is far too vague and indefinite to afford any satisfaction to a reasoning mind.

What causes could be so plainly and palpably in operation fifteen centuries before the desolation of the Jews, as to enable a sagacious politician to deduce from them the effects which stand developed in the prophecy of Moses? Had it been merely foretold, that the Israelites would be conquered and subjugated by some more powerful nation; it might perhaps have been somewhat difficult absolutely to prove the divinity of the prophecy from its faithful accomplishment: for the subjugation of a weaker by a stronger people is an event of familiar and perpetual occurrence. But the infidel must be aware, that such is *not* the sole purport of the prophecy before us.—By what knowledge of cause and effect could Moses anticipate, at the distance of fifteen centuries, that the Jews would finally be subdued by a remote and not by a neighbouring people, by a nation whose language was unintelligible to them and not by a nation whose language they understood? How could he foresee, that they would be scattered over the whole world; and not merely, as in the ordinary course of victory, reduced to subjection? How could he securely pronounce, that their dispersion, when effected, would not be temporary, but of an immensely long duration? How could he know, that many of them would be sold as despised slaves into that Egypt, from which he was then triumphantly conducting them? What conceivable train of thought could lead him to declare, that a people, then prosperous and triumphant and dreaded, should



become an astonishment and a proverb and a by-word in every varied country of their dispersion? All these several matters form integral parts of the prophecy, and they have all minutely taken place. If then we be required to account for the accomplishment of the oracle, on the ground that Moses sagaciously anticipated effects from known existing causes: we have certainly a right to demand, what causes were in existence more than fourteen centuries before the Christian era, from which such varied and multiplied and extraordinary effects might be securely foreseen and announced. The person, who can believe in their existence without much stronger evidence than (I suspect) will ever be produced, evinces a degree of abject credulity, which to men ignorant of the vagaries of Infidelity might well seem absolutely impossible.

2. The second conceivable mode of solving the difficulty is to ascribe, at once, the whole circumstance of the completion of the prophecy, to a lucky accident.

Singular co-incidences, it may be argued by the infidel, sometimes occur: and a remarkable case even of a prophecy may be adduced, which, notwithstanding its accurate accomplishment, no one supposes to have been a revelation from heaven. If Moses had predicted *the dispersion of the Jews*, Seneca has foretold *the discovery of America*. Hence, if, in the one case, the completion of the prophecy demonstrates the inspiration of the prophet; it must equally do so, in the other case: or conversely, if completion be deemed, in the one case, no proof of inspiration; then neither is it in the other. "Give me," says Collins, "a prophecy from your Bible, which may be as clearly predictive of any event which you may choose to allege for the accomplishment, as the verses of Seneca have by mere accident proved to be, of the discovery of America by Christopher Columbus. Give me such a prophecy from your Bible, as I have produced to you from a heathen poet, who yet was no prophet nor claimed the character; and I will turn believer."

Now, even if we allow the utmost praise of accuracy to the prediction of Seneca; it still would have been no very difficult matter, to adduce a prophecy from the Bible quite as minutely fulfilled, and thence to claim from Collins the ratification of his own voluntary promise: for, with whatever exactness the prophecy of Seneca may have been accomplished, it can scarcely be asserted that the prediction of Moses has experienced a less accurate fulfilment. But such a retort, whether satisfactory or unsatisfactory to the infidel, is by no means satisfactory to the Christian. Admitting the divine inspiration of Moses, and

denying the divine inspiration of Seneca, he stands pledged, on his own principles, to give an adequate reason, why he draws two such different conclusions from two equally fulfilled prophecies. To perform this task is happily no very difficult matter.

(1.) We may begin with observing, that the characteristics of the two prophecies differ essentially in a point of prime importance.

The prophecy of the Hebrew lawgiver comprises a very considerable number of distinct particulars; each of which must be shewn to have been accurately fulfilled: otherwise, if there be a failure in any one article, the defence of the entire prophecy, as a revelation from God, is rendered untenable. In the case of a prophecy thus constructed, it is not enough to be able to say, that it has been fulfilled in *this* particular or in *that* particular; we stand pledged, either to shew its completion in *every* particular, or to give up its divine inspiration. The prediction of Moses, had it been delivered as a mere random guess, might have been partly fulfilled, and partly unfulfilled. Thus the Jews might have been subdued, not by a distant nation with whose language they were unacquainted, but by a neighbouring nation whose speech was familiar to them: or they might have been subdued by a distant nation with whose language they were unacquainted, but not torn away from their own land and dispersed over the face of the whole earth: or they might have been torn away and scattered but soon restored: or they might have continued long in a dispersed state, but treated all the while with great kindness and indulgence: or they might actually have become a proverb and by-word, but still in the day of their desolation might have been sold as slaves into Italy and not into Egypt. All these and many more changes might be rung at pleasure upon the various particulars specified by Moses: and, if a failure of accomplishment could have been detected in any one point, the prophecy, viewed as a whole, would not have been accurately fulfilled; and therefore no argument, in favour of a divine revelation, could have been legitimately built upon it. Now, according to any fair and rational computation of what is called *the doctrine of chances*, how immense is the improbability, that the minute accomplishment of a prediction, in no less than seventeen distinct particulars (for such is their amount, as summed up article after article by Bp. Newton,) should after all be a mere lucky accident.\* It would be curious to calculate what are styled

\* I have not noticed *all* the particulars marked out by Moses: for the

*the odds.* The result, I am persuaded, would be this : that he, who could contentedly ascribe the exact completion of such a complicated prophecy to absolute chance, would exhibit a much greater degree of credulity, than he who believed it to be a revelation from heaven. For let it be observed, that the present argument is founded, not upon the completion of a simple prophecy, but upon the completion of a highly complicated prophecy ; of a prophecy comprehending seventeen distinct particulars, *all* of which, without a single exception, have been accurately and fully accomplished.

On the other hand, the prophecy of Seneca, if *prophecy* we must call it, sets forth a single solitary insulated matter. *In late years ages shall arrive, when the ocean shall relax the bounds of the universe, and a mighty land shall be laid open, and Tiphys shall unveil new worlds, and Thule shall no longer be the utmost extremity of the earth.\** The naked fact of the *discovery of a new continent*, is announced : and this is the whole that is foretold. Not a single particular is added. We are not taught, whether the discovery should be made in the east or in the west, in the north or in the south : nor, so far as the verbal precision of the oracle is concerned, can we be positive, whether America, or Greenland, or New Holland, is specially designated ; for the prediction is so vague, that it would have been equally fulfilled in the discovery of any one of them. We hear nothing of the opposition made to Columbus, or of the ingratitude with which he was subsequently treated. We are left wholly in the dark, as to the productions of the new world, the character of its inhabitants, and the cruelty of the conquerors. We receive no information as to the people by whom the discovery should be made. Not a hint is given of the peculiarities of Mexico and Peru. Nothing, in short, is told us, save that, at some time or another, a new world should be discovered. Hence it is clear, that the leading characteristics of the two prophecies before us are wholly different : the badge of the one being *definite complicity* : the badge of the other, *indefinite simplicity*. Had Moses merely foretold, that, *sooner or later, the Jews would be conquered by a nation more powerful than themselves* ; his prophecy would have been strictly analogous to that of Seneca : and I should then have readily allowed, that no argu-

sake of brevity, I have only discussed those which are most prominent. *All* the particulars, however, without a single exception, have come to pass ; a matter, most copiously and fully demonstrated by Bp. Newton. See his *Dissert. on the Prophecies*, dissert. vii.

\* Senec. Med. ver. 375—380.



ment in favour of a divine inspiration could be built upon the one, which might not with equal propriety be built upon the other. But weak indeed must be the discriminating powers of that person, who cannot see the grand and essential difference between a prophecy like that of Seneca, confined to a single particular; and a prophecy, like that of Moses, comprehending no less than seventeen perfectly distinct particulars.

(2.) We may next observe a marked dissimilarity in the grounds and reasons on which each prophecy is supported.

Moses as we have already seen, could not possibly have foretold the future destiny of his people by a sagacious induction of probable effects from already existing and well known causes. We can form no idea of the train of thought, by which a mere uninspired legislator, fifteen centuries even before the commencement of the events predicted, could have been led gratuitously to hazard a prophecy, at once singularly minute and abstractedly most unlikely to be ever accomplished.

But, in the poetical vaticination of Seneca, we trace with perfect facility the train of thought, which was passing through his mind: we observe him, in the verses which he puts into the mouth of his Chorus, deducing from well known and already existing causes their highly probable ultimate effects. "The sea has now yielded, and patiently endures all laws. No Argo, compacted by the hand of Pallas, and impelled illustrious by the oars of princes, is now sought after: any vulgar bark safely wanders over the deep. Every ancient boundary is removed: and cities have placed their new walls in new lands. The pervious globe has left nothing in the situation where once it was. The Indian drinks the cold Araxes: the Persians taste the Elb and the Rhine. In late years ages shall arrive, when the ocean shall relax the bounds of the universe, and a mighty land shall be laid open, and Tiphus shall unveil new worlds, and Thule shall no longer be the utmost extremity of the earth."\* Who does not here perceive, at a single

\* Nunc jam cessit pontus, et omnes  
Patitur leges. Non, Paladiâ  
Compacta manu, regum referens  
Incluta remos, quæritur Argo:  
Quælibet altum cymba pererrat.  
Terminus omnis motus; et urbes  
Muros terrâ posuere novos.  
Nil, quâ fuerat sede, reliquit  
Pervius orbis. Indus gelidum  
Potat Araxem: Albi, Persæ,  
Rhenumque, bibunt. Venient annis



glance, the mode in which the poet reasons? Navigation has been brought to a much higher degree of excellence, than it was at the time of the Argonautic expedition. Most probably, in the course of years, it will be carried to a state of perfection far beyond its present condition. Whenever that takes place, men will boldly tempt the main ocean: and then a new world, hitherto wrapt in obscurity and darkly concealed in the bosom of the mighty waters, will be familiarly unveiled to the eyes of the adventurous mariner.

(3.) Such, I think, was clearly enough the train of thought which occupied the mind of Seneca, when he penned the oracle brought forward so triumphantly by Mr. Collins: and I more than suspect, that the train itself was set in motion by a circumstance which effectually deprives the pretended vaticination even of the very semblance of a prophecy.

There is reason to believe, that the existence of America was not altogether unknown to the ancients; though, from the rude and imperfect state of navigation, it had not been visited since the downfall of the Phenician power. That the enterprising mariners of the Punic states were acquainted with it, and that their acquaintance was so intimate as to lead even to colonization, we have testimony as direct and explicit as can well be desired.

“Having treated of the islands on this side the pillars of Hercules,” says Diodorus Siculus, “we will proceed to those which are in the ocean. Opposite then to Africa, lies an island in the main sea, vast in extent, and lying westward at the distance of many days navigation. Its soil is fruitful, partly mountainous, and partly champagne. Navigable rivers intersect and water it. Forests abound in it, planted with various sorts of trees: and its towns contain many sumptuous edifices. Its climate is singularly mild, so that trees bear fruit during the greater part of the year. On the whole, it is so happy a region, that it may well be deemed the habitation rather of gods than of men. This island was long unknown, on account of its great distance from the rest of the world: but, ultimately, the following causes led to this discovery. The Phenicians, from the most remote time, were wont to undertake distant voyages for the sake of traffic. Hence they plant-

Secula seris, quibus Oceanus  
Vincula rerum laxet, et ingens  
Pateat tellus, Tiphysque novos  
Detegat orbes, nec sit terris  
Ultima Thule.

Senec. Med. ver. 365—380

ed many colonies in Africa, and not a few in western Europe. Their affairs prospering, and their riches increasing, they were at length tempted to push beyond the columns of Hercules into the main ocean. In such expeditions, they first built Gades, and explored the coast of Africa. Afterwards, being caught by a tempest, they were hurried away, after a voyage of many days, to the large island which has been described. From them, the knowledge of its extraordinary value and fertility was communicated to others; insomuch that the Tuscans, when they gained the empire of the sea, purposed to have colonized it: but they were prevented by the jealousy of the Carthagenians. For that people wished to reserve it as a refuge for themselves, in case their republic should ever be brought into danger: for they trusted, that they might migrate thither with all their families, as a region unknown to their conquerors, having prepared it in better times for their reception.”\*

From the Phenician discoverers, the knowledge of the existence of a western continent seems to have been spread very extensively.

Thus, according to Elian, Silenus told Midas, that Europe, Asia, and Africa, were islands surrounded by the ocean; and that beyond them there was a continent of infinite magnitude, which nourished large animals and men twice as tall and as long-lived as ourselves: that, in the same country, there were large states, varying from our own in their institutes and laws: and that that land contained such an immense quantity of gold and silver, that among the natives it was of less value than iron is with us.† Thus Apuleius, after describing the old continent as being in truth an island surrounded on all sides by the Atlantic ocean, adds, that the same ocean also washes other islands not less than this, which may well be deemed in a manner unknown, when we are not perfectly acquainted even with that which we ourselves inhabit.‡ Thus Ammianus Marcellinus asserts, that in the Atlantic ocean there is an island larger than all Europe.¶ And thus Avitus, in a work of Seneca himself, declares, that fertile lands lie in the ocean, and that beyond it there are other shores and another world.§

Under these circumstances, is it credible, or rather (when

\* Diod. Bibl. lib. iv. p. 299, 300. edit. Rhodoman.

† Ælian. Hist. lib. iii. apud Horn. de origin. Americ. lib. i. c. 10. p. 57.

‡ Apul. de mund. Oper. vol. ii. p. 122.

¶ Ammian. Marc. Apud Horn. ut supra.

§ Avit. in Senec. Suasor. Ibid.

the testimony of Avitus is considered) is it possible that Seneca could have been ignorant of the prevalent opinion relative to an immense island or continent, which was situated far westward of Africa, and which had been discovered and colonized by the Phenicians? What then becomes of the pretended prophecy, which Mr. Collins has brought forward with so much parade and confidence by way of stultifying the real prophecies of Holy Scriptures? Save as a poetical ornament, it neither claims nor possesses any one character of an oracle. Seneca was aware of the common belief, that a western continent had been discovered. He knew, likewise, that in the then imperfect state of navigation, all intercourse with it had ceased. But, deeming it highly probable that at some future period the science would be greatly improved, he announced, in the poetical form of a prophecy, that a complete and familiar discovery of this mysterious half-known region would be made after the lapse of many ages. In this obvious sense the passage is understood by the learned and ingenious Horn. He cites it, not, like Mr. Collins, as a prophecy; but as one out of many evidences, that the existence of America was not unknown to the ancients.\*

IV. The sum then of the whole matter may be briefly stated as follows:

We have now extant a prophecy, indisputably penned many ages before the Christian era: and we have likewise before our very eyes a most full and perfect accomplishment of this prophecy.

Neither of these two points can be controverted by the infidel. Hence he is reduced to the necessity, either of admitting the divine inspiration of the prophecy; an admission, which immediately and necessarily draws after it the additional admission that the Law of Moses was a revelation from heaven: or of denying the divine inspiration of the prophecy; either on the utterly untenable ground that it was merely the result of sagacious political anticipation, or on the equally untenable ground that a prediction comprehending no less than seventeen distinct particulars was minutely fulfilled in every particular simply and solely by a lucky accident.

Such being the plain state of the case, the naked question to be considered and answered is this: whether, under the circumstances which have been set forth, the man who admits, or the man who denies, the divine inspiration of the prophecy of Moses, evinces the more blind and determined credulity.

\* Horn. de origin. Americ. lib. i. c. 10. p. 57.

## SECTION V.

THE DIFFICULTIES ATTENDANT UPON DEISTICAL INFIDELITY IN  
REGARD TO THE FACTS AND CIRCUMSTANCES AND CHARACTER  
OF THE CHRISTIAN DISPENSATION.

HITHERTO I have considered the difficulties attendant upon deistical Infidelity, chiefly in regard to the abstract question of revelation *in general*, but partly also (through the medium of an eminent accomplished prophecy) in regard to the Levitical Dispensation *in particular*: I shall now proceed, the way having been thus cleared, to note the difficulties, which equally wait upon it in regard to the facts and circumstances and character of the Christian Dispensation.

I. The fact of the bare existence of Christianity in the world at this present moment is obviously certain and indisputable: the sole question, therefore, between the believer and the unbeliever is, how it started into existence, and what are its pretensions to be received as a divine revelation.

1. Now the account of its origin and early progress is contained in four parallel histories and in a subsequent narrative attached to them, all which documents are still extant.

These are found to correspond with the testimonies of the pagan writers Tacitus and Suetonius: and they are so repeatedly cited and referred to by an immense body of ecclesiastical writers, that we cannot reasonably doubt either their high antiquity or their general historical veracity in the relation of facts and circumstances. I say *general*: because, for the present I am willing to throw out of the discussion all those claims to the performance of miracles, which they so repeatedly put forth. Hence, when I assert that we cannot reasonably doubt their general historical veracity in the relation of facts and circumstances, I mean only to assert, that they give an accurate account of the proceedings and conduct and character and principles and sayings of the founder of Christianity and his immediate followers, just as we never think of doubting the general accuracy of the writings of Plato and Xenophon in regard to their master Socrates, or, (if we descend to more modern times) the writings of Boswell in regard to Johnson.

2. To dispute this reasonable assertion is, in fact, to unhinge



all historical evidence: for, as to the actual existence of such a person as Christ during the reigns of the Roman emperors Augustus and Tiberius, it is fully demonstrated by the positive testimony of Suetonius, Tacitus, Julian, Porphyry, Celsus, and various other writers inimical to Christianity: and, as to the actions and conduct of himself and his followers, it has never been denied, either by the Jews, or by the ancient pagan philosophers, who had the best opportunity of detecting imposition, that a true account has been given of them by those authors whom Christians deem sacred and inspired.

In truth, the whole narrative approves itself to be authentic by its exact falling in with general history. Christianity now exists: it must therefore have had a commencement. But we are quite sure, from the numerous writings of that period which have come down to us, that, although Christ himself was born in the Augustan age, his religion was not then in existence: hence it must have been brought into existence subsequent to the Augustan age. Now Tacitus expressly bears witness, both that it sprang up in the reign of Tiberius; that its author was crucified by the procurator Pontius Pilate; that, proceeding from Judea, it had spread, even before his days, as far as Rome; and that its proselytes were subjected to a bloody persecution during the reign of Nero.\* Accordingly, from Tacitus downward, Christ and Christianity and Christians are perpetually mentioned by writers both pagan and ecclesiastical. Henceforth, the history of the Church becomes a portion of the history of Rome: nor can the one proceed a step without the other.

*“It has been observed with truth as well as propriety, (says a writer, who will not be suspected of much affection for Christianity, though his acquaintance with the laws of evidence forbid his contradicting the general veracity of the evangelical narrative,) that the conquests of Rome prepared and facilitated those of Christianity. The authentic histories of the actions of*

\* Ergo abolendo rumori Nero subdidit reos, et quæsitissimis poenis adfecit, quos per flagitia invisos vulgus Christianos appellabat. Auctor nominis ejus Christus, Tiberio imperitante, per procuratorem Pontium Pilatum supplicio affectus erat. Repressaque in præsens exitiabilis superstitio rursus erumpebat, non modo per Judæam originem hujus mali, sed per urbem etiam, quo cuncta undique atrocia aut pudenda confluunt celebranturque. Igitur primo correpti qui fatebantur, deinde indicio eorum multitudo ingens, haud perinde in crimina incendiî, quam odio generis humani, convicti sunt. Et pereuntibus addita ludibria, ut ferarum tergis contacti, laniatu canum interirent, aut crucibus affixi, aut flamat, atque ubi defecisset dies in usum nocturni luminis urerentur. Annal. lib. xv. §. 44.

Christ were composed in the Greek language, after the Gentile converts were grown extremely numerous. As soon as those histories were translated into the Latin tongue, they were perfectly intelligible to all the subjects of Rome, excepting only to the peasants of Syria and Egypt, for whose benefit particular versions were afterwards made. The public high-ways, which had been constructed for the use of the legions, opened an easy passage for the Christian missionaries from Damascus to Corinth, and from Italy to the extremity of Spain or Britain. There is the strongest reason to believe, that, before the reigns of Diocletian and Constantine, the faith of Christ had been preached in every province and in all the great cities of the empire. The rich provinces, that extend from the Euphrates to the Ionian sea, were the principal theatre, on which the apostle of the Gentiles displayed his zeal and piety. The seeds of the Gospel, which he had scattered in a fertile soil, were diligently cultivated by his disciples: and it should seem, that, during the two first centuries, the most considerable body of Christians was contained within those limits. Among the societies which were instituted in Syria, none were more ancient or more illustrious than those of Damascus, of Berea or Aleppo, and of Antioch. The prophetic introduction of the Apocalypse has described and immortalized the seven churches of Asia; Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamus, Thyatira, Sardes, Laodicea, and Philadelphia: and their colonies were soon diffused over that populous country. In a very early period, the islands of Cyprus and Crete, the provinces of Thrace and Macedonia, gave a favourable reception to the new religion: and Christian republics were soon founded in the cities of Corinth, of Sparta, and of Athens. To these domestic testimonies we may add the confession, the complaints, and the apprehensions, of the Gentiles themselves. From the writings of Lucian, a philosopher who had studied mankind and who describes their manners in the most lively colours, we may learn, that under the reign of Commodus, his native country of Pontus was filled with Epicureans and Christians. Within fourscore years after the death of Christ, the humane Pliny laments the magnitude of the evil which he vainly attempted to eradicate. In his very curious epistle to the Emperor Trajan, he affirms, that the temples were almost deserted, that the sacred victims scarcely found any purchasers, and that the superstition had not only infected the cities but had even spread itself into the villages and the open country of Pontus and Bithynia.”\*

\* Gibbon's Hist. of the Decline and Fall. Chap. xv. vol. ii. p. 357—360.

From such innumerable testimonies, it might have been thought that the *proper existence of Christ upon earth* would at least have been universally allowed. But, while Mr. Gibbon, judging by the common and well-known laws of moral evidence, entertains no doubt of the fact; Mr. Volney chooses rather to follow the extraordinary speculations of Mr. Burigni. This person he whimsically styles a *sagacious writer*: doubtless because his rare sagacity has been shown by what his admirer calls an *absolute demonstration*, that even the personal existence of Christ in this our nether world, rests not upon a more solid basis than that of Hercules, or Osiris, or Buddha. By any sober judge of historical evidence, the testimony of such a writer as Tacitus to the fact of Christ's existence upon earth, and his crucifixion by the Roman governor Pontius Pilate, even if we omit the cloud of other concurring parallel testimonies, would not be placed upon a light footing: but Mr. Volney, quite satisfied with the demonstration of Burigni, lays it down as a clear case, that no such person as our Lord ever flourished in this world; and, on that position, frames a theory, which, on pain of being ridiculed as a generation of credulous dupes, we are forthwith required to adopt.

What then is the theory in question? Truly, if it can be set forth without a smile, it is no other than the following:

Mr. Volney gravely assures us, on the word of a philosopher, emancipated from all vulgar prejudices in favour of historical testimony, that the divine personage, whom Christians, during the space of well nigh eighteen centuries, have ignorantly revered as their crucified Redeemer, is neither more nor less than the sun in the firmament; that the virgin Mary is one of the zodiacal signs; the constellation *Virgo* to wit: and that Christ's crucifixion by Pontius Pilate, and his resurrection from the dead on the third day, are nothing more than the sun's declension to the winter solstice, and his subsequent return to the summer solstice through the vivifying season of spring.\*

\* The theory of Mr. Volney is discussed at large in Faber's *Origin of Pagan Idol.* book vi. chap. 6. § iii. 1. vol. iii. p. 643—654. Mr. Volney, to rid himself of the troublesome evidence of Tacitus, who flourished only about seventy years after the time when Pontius Pilate was the Roman procurator of Judea, is willing to imagine, that he wrote from the false depositions of the Christian prisoners; who, though they knew all the while that Christ was the sun, declared that he was a Jew who had been crucified by Pilate. This falsehood, it seems, was never detected; until Mr. Volney, at the end of some eighteen centuries, luckily took it in hand. For the Roman magistrates,



4. I have thought it right to notice this hypothesis ; though I am far from wishing uncandidly to intimate, that it is the standard doctrine of Infidelity. The ludicrous credulity of Mr. Volney is, I believe, the sole property of himself and of those few select friends who have been initiated into his greater Mysteries.

We may venture then to assume, that the evangelical narratives set forth a substantially true account of the proceedings, and conduct, and character, and principles, and sayings of the founder of Christianity and his immediate followers, just as the writings of Xenophon and Plato similarly exhibit the various lineaments of their master Socrates : for to deny a position, supported upon such strong and incontrovertible testimony, as the main body of infidels are perfectly aware, evinces a much greater degree of credulity, than to admit it. On these grounds, discarding, without further ceremony, the hypothesis of Mr. Volney, I shall reason from the general circumstances detailed in the New Testament, just as I would reason from the general circumstances detailed in the *Memorabilia* of Xenophon.

II. The founder of the Christian religion expressly claimed to be a messenger sent from God. "Ye both know me," said he to the Jews, "and ye know whence I am : I am not come of myself ; but he that sent me is true, whom ye know not. But I know him : for I am from him, and he hath sent me.\* The word which ye hear, is not mine, but the Father's which sent me."† Now the infidel denies, that Christ was sent from God ; and pronounces that the Gospel is not a revelation from heaven. Hence, on his own principles, he is bound to maintain, either that Christ was a daring impostor, or that he was a brain-sick enthusiast : for, if the divine authority of his mission be denied, he must inevitably be pronounced either the one or the other of these two characters.

Such being the case, the point to be considered is, whether,

before whom the depositions were taken, did not happen to think of making the very natural inquiry, whether, seventy years before, such a man as Christ had or had not been crucified by Pilate : nor did a single Jewish or provincial witness come forward to declare that the whole story was a gross fabrication. Hence according to Mr. Volney, it very easily happened, that the unlucky historian was shamefully befuddled by a set of gross liars, who themselves chose to be worried by dogs, and to be crucified, and to be burned alive, in support of what they all the while knew to be an absurd falsehood. Nothing, surely, save the credulity of a professed unbeliever, could digest so portentous a discovery, as this of our French philosopher.

\* John vii. 28, 29.

† John xiv. 24.



from the historical documents which have come down to us, we have any sufficient evidence to esteem Christ either an impostor or an enthusiast.

1. Perhaps there never was a period, which offered more tempting invitations to the projects of a designing impostor, than that, during which the prophet of Nazareth exhibited himself as a teacher sent from God.

The Jews, highly elated by their religious privileges, and exulting in the character of being the peculiar people of Jehovah, bore with extreme impatience and dissatisfaction the Roman yoke which had been imposed upon them. Their eagerness to throw off this yoke was increased by a very remarkable, but perfectly well-attested circumstance. From calculating the numbers specified in one of their ancient prophecies, they had, for some years before the birth of Christ, been in full expectation of a mysterious personage; who had been repeatedly announced by the seers of their nation, as a mighty deliverer and a powerful sovereign;\* and this expectation continued in full force, until the sacking of Jerusalem by Titus; which occurred about thirty-seven years after the death of Christ. That such an expectation was generally prevalent shortly before the birth of Christ, is evident from the language used by the evangelist Luke respecting Anna the prophetess: having herself beheld the infant Jesus, and having acknowledged him as the promised deliverer, *she spake of him*, we are told, *to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem.*† And, that the knowledge of this expectation was both diffused to a very wide extent, and that the expectation itself continued to operate until the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus, we are positively assured, both by the Jewish historian Josephus, and by the two Roman historians Tacitus and Suetonius: in truth, the belief in question was one main cause of the obstinacy with which the Jews held out against the armies of Titus; for, as we learn from Josephus, many impostors confidently taught the people that they might expect assistance from heaven, and one of them even at the very last declared that God himself had commanded them to ascend to the temple where they should assuredly receive a miraculous token of their safety.‡

Such being the state of the public mind, it is clear that there never could be a season more favourable to the projects of a

\* Dan. ix. 24—27.

† Luke ii. 38.

‡ Joseph. de bell. Jud. lib. vi. c. 5. § 4. p. 1293. § 2. p. 1281, edit. Hudson. Tacit. Hist. lib. v. § 13. Sueton. in vit. Vespasian.

politico-theological impostor. The ground was, as it were, ready prepared for him. Nothing was necessary, save, with a reasonable degree of worldly prudence and address, to avail himself of already existing circumstances.

(1.) How, then, if we may judge from the ordinary springs of human conduct, would a sagacious impostor have acted during the period which has been described?

An impostor, *as* an impostor, must doubtless have purposed his own honour, and advantage, and aggrandizement : for never either *did*, or (in the very nature of things) *could*, an impostor act on other principles, or from other motives. The Jews, from a literal and gross interpretation of their ancient prophecies respecting the Messiah, fully believed, that he would be a mighty and warlike temporal prince, who would liberate them from the Roman yoke, confer upon them an extraordinary abundance of prosperity, and exalt them to be the head of the nations : they believed, in short, that he would be a character not very dissimilar to that, which, some six centuries afterwards, the Arabian impostor Mohammed exhibited with so much success to a proud, and sensual, and ambitious world. An artful miscreant, therefore, who wished for his own ends to personate the expected Messiah, would doubtless have availed himself of the popular notions respecting that exalted personage. This he would obviously do for two several reasons : he could not rationally hope for success, if he appeared in a character wholly different from that which had been anticipated ; and he could promise to himself no advantage, if he declined to avail himself of those preconceptions which had such an evident, and natural, and necessary tendency to promote the aggrandizement of an interested adventurer. Hence an impostor, unless he were destitute of every grain of common sense, could not but have acted in the following manner. Giving himself out to be the promised, and then eagerly expected Messiah, and having prepared the way by a judicious arrangement with some few trusty, and able, and determined followers, he would invite the whole nation to rise as one man, and to court assured victory under the banners of a heaven-commissioned leader. The Pharisees he would flatter by a decorous approbation of their specious piety : the Sadducees he would entice by the hopes of those temporal blessings, which alone they affected : and the whole nation he would dexterously draw after him, by striking in with all their prejudices, and by confirming all their expectations. As the predicted Messiah was destined to be a prince, he would claim to be received as the temporal king of Israel ; and,

when he had attained that elevation, he would seek to establish himself in it, partly by inducing the chief men of the country to accept offices under him, and partly by a wise and diligent preparation to meet the formidable armies of Rome whenever they should be brought to act against him.

These, with others of a kindred description, would clearly be the measures taken by an impostor, who, in the reign of Tiberius, wished, for the sake of his own aggrandizement, to play the part of the expected Messiah.

In reality, we can form no idea of an impostor, under such circumstances, acting differently : and absolute matter of fact has shewn the estimate to be just. Broken as the Jews had been by the power of Titus, their rebellious spirit was still unsubdued, and their hope of a temporal deliverer was still unrepressed. In the reign of Adrian, the smothered flame burst forth. Coziba, the chief of a band of robbers, was the leader of the insurgents. To facilitate his project, he assumed the name of *Bar-Cochab*, or *the son of the star*, in allusion to the prophecy of Balaam respecting the Messiah : and in that character, according to their perverted conceptions of the promised Saviour, he was readily acknowledged by his infatuated countrymen. Having thus procured the recognition of his claim, he engaged to deliver his nation from the Roman yoke, and to restore its ancient liberty and glory. The famous Rabbi Akibha, being chosen by him for his precursor, espoused his cause, afforded him the sanction of his name, publicly anointed him as the Messiah, placed a diadem on his head as king of the Jews, caused money to be coined in his name, followed him to the field at the head of twenty thousand of his disciples, and acted in the capacity of master of his horse. By calling on all the descendants of Abraham to assist the hope of Israel, an army of two hundred thousand men was soon raised, who repaired to Bither, a city near Jerusalem, chosen by the impostor for the capital of his new kingdom.\*

To pursue the narrative any farther is superfluous : we have here a practical exemplification of the measures which had been previously laid down from the mere abstract necessity of the case, and the general nature of things. An impostor, during the period of which I am treating, could not, upon any conceivable principle of action, have conducted himself differently from Coziba.

(2.) If then Christ were an impostor, he could not but have acted as Coziba did : and, doubtless, when we consider the

\* Basnage's Hist. of the Jews. p. 515.



condition of the Jews during the reign of Tiberius in contrast with their condition during the reign of Adrian, he would, humanly speaking, have had a much more flattering prospect of success. But how, in effect, did Christ act? We find him adopting a line of conduct, which was the very opposite to that of Coziba, and of every other impostor similarly circumstanced; a line of conduct, which had a necessary tendency to baffle every hope entertained by an ambitious adventurer; a line of conduct too, which common sense itself might foresee could not but prove fatal to all such hopes.

The Messiah was announced by the prophets as a king: Jesus, therefore, claiming to be the Messiah, of necessity claimed also the regal character. But in what manner did he claim it? In a sense favourable to ambition; the very sense in which it was understood by the Jews? Or in a sense perfectly hostile to ambition; a sense, which the worldly-minded Jews never once dreamed of? "My kingdom," said he, "is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence."\* Nor can it be said, that this account of the nature of Christ's kingdom was merely the evasive subterfuge of disappointed ambition, given indeed before Pilate, when every hope of an earthly monarchy had vanished, but unheard of so long as there was any chance of success: on the contrary, it exactly tallied both with the previous declarations and previous actions of this extraordinary claimant of the Jewish Messiaship. To the very last, his disciples seem to have been infected with the general notion of their countrymen, that the kingdom of the great deliverer was to be of a temporal nature. Hence it was, with their high indignation, that the mother of Zebedee's children petitioned, on behalf of her two sons, for the two chief places in that kingdom: and hence it was, even on the eve of the crucifixion, that there was a strife among them which should be accounted the greatest.† But what was the language of Jesus himself in both these cases? On the first occasion, he said: "Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you: but, whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many."‡ On the second occa-

\* John xviii. 36.

† Matt. xx. 20—24. Luke xxii. 24.

‡ Matt. xx. 25—28.



sion he similarly said : "The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them ; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. But ye shall not be so : but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger ; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve. Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptations. And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me ; that ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel."\* Do we ask the nature of this promised kingdom ? Christ assures his disciples, that it was to be expected only in a future and a better world. "As the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so shall it be in the end of this world. The Son of man shall send forth his angels : and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity ; and shall cast them into a furnace of fire : there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun, in the kingdom of their Father."† In exact accordance with this statement, while he promises to his faithful followers an abundance of honour and glory hereafter ; he at once nips in the bud all their earthly ambition, by declaring, to the evidently grievous disappointment of Peter, to whom he had immediately before given the keys of the kingdom of heaven, that instead of becoming a temporal prince, he would shortly be put to death by his enemies. "From that time forth," says the evangelical historian Matthew, "began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders, and chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day. Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying : Be it far from thee, Lord : this shall not be unto thee. But he turned, and said unto Peter : Get thee behind me, Satan ; thou art an offence unto me, for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men. Then said Jesus unto his disciples : If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life, shall lose it : and whosoever will lose his life for my sake, shall find it. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul ? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul ? For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels : and then he shall reward every man according to his works."‡

The actions of Christ perfectly tallied with his declarations.

\* Luke xxii. 25—30. † Matt. xiii. 40—43. ‡ Matt. xvi. 21—27.

Not the least step did he take to promote any scheme of temporal aggrandizement. Instead of exhorting his countrymen to rise and throw off the Roman domination, when the captious political question was put to him, *Is it lawful to give tribute unto Cæsar or not*: he rather taught them the two-fold duty of discharging their several obligations to God and their sovereign.\* Instead of inculcating those fiery and vehement passions, which might best subserve the purposes of an impostor aiming at an earthly kingdom: he rather enforced dispositions, which of all others would be the most prejudicial to such a scheme; meekness, humility, forgiveness, patience, submission, and non-resistance to injuries.† Instead of eagerly availing himself of the golden opportunity, which once occurred, of acquiring the sovereignty of Israel: he, unaccountably, on the supposition of his being an impostor, threw it away in mere wantonness; and thus lost it forever. *Then those men, when they had seen the miracle that Jesus did, said: This is of a truth that prophet, that should come into the world. When Jesus therefore perceived that they would come and take him by force to make him a king, he departed again into a mountain himself alone.*‡ Now, for the present, whether the alleged fact of the miracle be admitted or rejected, the conduct of Christ, on the theory of his being an impostor, will be equally inexplicable. The train of thought, in consequence of which the people violently attempted to make him a king, is perfectly clear. They were led, for some reason or another, to believe him the Messiah. But the Messiah, according to their notions of him, was to be a mighty temporal prince. Hence they sought, forthwith, to invest him with the regal character. Had he been an impostor who sought an earthly kingdom, now was the favourable moment. He refused to be made a king, and withdrew himself to the solitude of an unfrequented mountain. It is utterly preposterous to believe, that such would, or could have been the conduct of an impostor. See how Coziba acted under parallel circumstances: contrast him royally crowned by Akibha, and advancing against the Romans at the head of two hundred thousand men, with Christ refusing the diadem and retiring into solitude; and then say, which is the impostor, and which is the prophet sent from God.

Equally unaccountable are other parts also of Christ's conduct, on the supposition of his being an impostor.

No adventurer could reasonably have hoped for success, except by adopting a system of dexterous conciliation towards

\* Matt. xxii. 17—21. † Matt. v. 3—12, 38—44. ‡ John vi. 14, 15

all the higher classes among the Jews. Hence he would have studiously flattered their prejudices: and, by an adroit commendation both of their doctrine and their practice, would have endeavoured to win them over to the furtherance of his projects. Christ, however, instead of acting upon these obvious principles, took such an extraordinary course, that in a very short time he effectually alienated all the ruling powers and made them his bitterest enemies. Their favourite opinions he directly controverted: their hypocrisy he unceremoniously exposed; their corrupt practices he exhibited to the people in all their undisguised deformity: and themselves he stigmatized with a severity at once austere and contemptuous. *Why do you transgress the commandment of God by your tradition?* was the cutting question, which he put to the Scribes and Pharisees of Jerusalem. *For God commanded, saying: Honour thy father and mother; and, He that curseth father or mother, let him die the death. But ye say: Whosoever shall say to his father or his mother, It is a gift by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me, and honour not his father or his mother; he shall be free. Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition. Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying: This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoreth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.\** Nor were reproofs of this description addressed to their subjects in private only: the multitude, who had been wont to admire pharisaic piety as something pre-eminently strict and severe, were openly and unreservedly cautioned against their long venerated teachers; an affront of all others the most difficult to be digested or forgiven. "The Scribes and the Pharisees," said Jesus to the crowds that surrounded him, "sit in Moses' seat: all therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do. But do not ye after their works: for they say and do not. For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders: but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers. But all their works they do for to be seen of men. They make broad their phylacteries: and enlarge the borders of their garments: and love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues, and greetings in the markets, and to be called of men Rabbi, Rabbi. But woe unto you Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves,

\* Matt. xv. 4—9.



nor suffer ye them that are entering to go in. Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayers: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation. Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte; and, when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves. Woe unto you, ye blind guides, which say: Whosoever shall swear by the temple, it is nothing; but whosoever shall swear by the gold of the temple, he is a debtor! Ye fools, and blind: for whether is greater the gold, or the temple that sanctifieth the gold? And, whosoever shall swear by the altar it is nothing: but whosoever sweareth by the gift that is upon it, he is guilty! Ye fools and blind: for whether is greater, the gift, or the altar that sanctifieth the gift? Whoso therefore shall swear by the altar, sweareth by it and by all things thereon. And, whoso shall swear by the temple, sweareth by it and by him that dwelleth therein. And he, that shall swear by heaven, sweareth by the throne of God and by him that sitteth thereon. Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin; and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone. Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat and swallow a camel. Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess. Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also. Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity. Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous, and say: If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets. Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers. Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell? Wherefore, behold, I send unto you prophets and wise men and scribes: and some of them ye shall kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city: that upon



you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar. Verily I say unto you : All these things shall come upon this generation. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets and stonest them that are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered together thy children, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings ; and ye would not ! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.”\* That the corrupt rulers of Israel should be vehemently enraged at the bold reformer, who could publicly utter such unwelcome truths ; and that instead of furthering any projects which “as an impostor” he might be supposed to have conceived, they should at length compass his death : will excite little wonder in him, who has at all studied the workings of the human heart. But, that an impostor, who in his character of *an impostor* must specially have had his own interest and aggrandizement in view, could deliberately act a part, which had an obvious and necessary tendency to irritate and provoke all the leading men of the nation selected as the object of his selfish plans ; that an impostor, himself absolutely foreseeing and declaring that his conduct would lead both to his suffering many things, and to his being rejected of the people whom he sought to delude, should nevertheless, in plain opposition to the dictates of common sense, persist in such conduct :†—that an impostor, as an impostor, should, with his eyes wide open to the consequences, act thus strangely, thus incongruously, thus unaccountably, is a circumstance, which does indeed beggar the utmost profuseness of credulity.

Nor was the conduct of Christ, in regard to his disciples, less extraordinary, than his conduct in regard to the Scribes and Pharisees. An impostor, if placed in a similar situation, would have allured his followers by bountiful promises of worldly prosperity : the long-expected kingdom of the Messiah was about to be erected ; the Roman yoke was on the point of being broken : Judah was on the eve of liberty and triumph ; every faithful adherent would be munificently rewarded by honours, and dignities, and emoluments in the mighty empire of a prince, who was alike able and willing to repay the services of his friends and companions. This would have been the language of an impostor : this, in fact, was the language of Coziba. But was it the language of Christ ? Let us hear his own words, addressed unreservedly to his follow-

\* Matt. xxiii.

† Luke xvii. 25.

ers : " Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves : be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves. But beware of men : for they will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues. And ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them and the Gentiles. But, when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak : for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you. And the brother shall deliver up the brother to death ; and the father, the child ; and the children shall rise up against their parents, and cause them to be put to death. And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake : but he that endureth to the end shall be saved. But, when they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another. The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord. It is enough for the disciple, that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household ? Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul : but rather fear him, which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.\* If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For, whosoever will save his life, shall lose it ; and whosoever will lose his life for my sake, shall find it.† The Son of man shall be betrayed into the hands of men ; and they shall kill him, and the third day he shall be raised again.‡ And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars : for nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. All these are the beginning of sorrow. Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you : and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake.¶ If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own : but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world ; therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you : the servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you ; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also. But all these things will they do unto you for my name's sake, because they know not him that sent me.§ These things have I spoken unto you, that

\* Matt. x. 16—28.

† Matt. xvi. 24, 25.

‡ Matt. xvii. 22, 23.

¶ Matt. xxiv. 6—9.

§ John xv. 18—21.

ye should not be offended. They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service. And these things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father nor me.”\* Such was the constant tenor of Christ’s language to his disciples: such was the mode in which he sought to allure followers, and to gain proselytes. That its total want of earthly encouragement was abundantly felt, is clear, not only from the reason of the thing, but from the express testimony of the narrative itself. On one occasion of receiving these melancholy and discouraging communications, it is said, that the disciples *were exceedingly sorry*:† on another, that *Peter began to rebuke him*.‡ But not in the slightest degree would Christ either change, or even soften his language. He still persevered in his own most extraordinary mode of gaining followers. He still allured his countrymen to enlist under his banners, by promising them every sort of persecution, universal hatred, flight, banishment, excommunication, contempt, affliction, death. This was the method in which he invariably thought fit to advance his project, whatever might be its precise nature. Now can any person seriously believe, that an artful and selfish impostor would adopt such a plan of aggrandizement, as Christ, if we suppose him to be an impostor, must be viewed as having actually adopted? The thing is incredible: and he, who, with these testimonies before his eyes, and with even a moderate knowledge of human nature in his head, can yet persuade himself against all moral evidence, that the man who could systematically act as Christ acted, was nevertheless an impostor who sought his own aggrandizement and advancement; such a person, instead of charging a believer in revelation with an easy faith, may himself be well deemed a very portent of credulity.

On the whole, if Christ were indeed an impostor it will baffle the greatest ingenuity to determine what could have been his object. Wealth, and power, and reputation, those darling idols of the proud and the ambitious, he utterly slighted himself: and all his precepts have a direct tendency to discourage the love of them in others, and thus plainly to make his followers the most useless tools for an artful adventurer that can well be imagined. What then was his object, if he were an impostor? In the case of other notorious and allowed impostors, Coziba, for instance, and Mohammed, nothing is more

\* John xvi. 1—3.

† Matt. xvii. 23.

‡ Matt. xvi. 22.

easy than to detect and define the ultimate object of their varied machinations ; yet it will not be the least difficulty, with which Infidelity is hampered, to specify, clearly, and distinctly, and on solid grounds, moral and historical, the precise object which Jesus of Nazareth had in view, when he gave himself out to be the expected Messiah, and when he thus attempted to delude his Hebrew countrymen.

2. But, if Christ were not an artful impostor, it may be contended that he was a brain-sick enthusiast : a solution which will equally destroy the belief that he was a prophet really sent from God.

Let us see, then, whether this hypothesis bids more fair for stability than the last.

In prosecuting such an inquiry, we are obviously led to study the character of Christ, as it stands developed in the histories of him, which have come down to us : for, whether he be, or be not an enthusiast, we can only form a judgment from his words and from his actions.

(1.) Now, with regard to his words, even Infidelity itself allows, that so pure, and so perfect, and so rational a code of morals was never before promulgated. It is easy to distinguish between the wild ravings of enthusiasm, and the words of soberness and truth. Let any person carefully read the Sermon on the mount, together with the various other recorded discourses of Christ ; and then honestly say, to which class these documents ought to be referred.

“Blessed are the poor in spirit ; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that mourn ; for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek ; for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness ; for they shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful ; for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart ; for they shall see God. Blessed are the peace-makers ; for they shall be called the children of God. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven. Whosoever shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so ; he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven : but, whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say unto you, that except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven. Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time ; Thou shalt not commit adultery : but I say unto you, that whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her, hath



committed adultery with her already in his heart. Ye have heard that it hath been said ; Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy : but I say unto you, love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you ; that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven : for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them ; otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. Therefore, when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do, in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, they have their reward. But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth : that thine alms may be in secret ; and thy Father, which seeth thee in secret, himself shall reward thee openly. And, when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are : for they love to pray, standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, they have their reward. But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet ; and, when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret ; and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly. Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal : but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal. Judge not, that ye be not judged : for with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged ; and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye ? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye ; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye ? Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye ; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye. Give not that which is holy unto the dogs ; neither cast ye your pearls before swine : lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles ? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit ; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them. Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven ; but

he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.† shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it: Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.† Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done unto you.‡ A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.”||

Such were the precepts of him who claimed to be the expected Messiah and the Saviour of mankind. Their unexampled purity will be controverted by none: and their intrinsic excellence approves itself to every heart and head. *Never man spake like this man*, was the honest confession of the officers who had been sent to apprehend him:§ *Truly this was the Son of God*, was the acknowledgment of the centurion and his companions, even while he was hanging upon the cross.¶ In the sayings of our Lord, we behold a calm, and dignified, and heavenly strain of morality: but we vainly seek for the least tincture of insane fanaticism. All is composed and serene, equal and consistent. There are no jarring incongruities, no clashing contradictions, no undue elevation of one moral virtue, no unreasonable depression of another. Every thing appears in its right place: the whole is perfect harmony: from a perusal of the system we rise satisfied and convinced. Throughout these admirable discourses, instead of that superiority to ordinances which some enthusiasts have claimed for themselves and their followers, we find the dutiful necessity of obedience to the moral law strenuously inculcated upon every disciple: instead of a violent and exclusive enunciation of some one favourite dogma or line of conduct, we find our whole duty both to God and man clearly explained, and impartially enforced: instead of those useless austerities and appalling self-macerations which in all ages and countries Fanaticism has proposed as the surest mode of propitiating the Deity, we find universal love, and meekness, and sincerity, and mercy and purity, both of heart and life, set forth as the

\* Matt. v. vi. vii.

† John xiii. 13—15.

‡ John vii. 46.

† Matt. xxii. 37—40.

|| John xiii. 34, 35.

¶ Matt. xxvii. 54.

only certain evidence of our being the children of a heavenly Father. In no part of Christ's recorded language can we discover the slightest vestige of a wild enthusiasm.

(2.) As little can we perceive it in any of those actions, which are recorded as having been performed by him.

When a captious question was proposed as to the legality of the Jew's paying tribute to Cesar, we cannot doubt what the answer of an enthusiast would have been. Inflated with high notions of his own divine commission, and viewing with indignation the subject state of the people whom he believed himself appointed to deliver, he would forthwith have boldly declared the deed unlawful, and would have enjoined either a sullen refusal or a bold resistance by force of arms.—But Christ, with singular adroitness, neither exposed himself to the anger of the Jews by controverting one of their favourite maxims, nor compromised himself with the Roman government by declaring that tribute ought not to be paid. "Render unto Cesar," said he upon an inspection of the imperial effigies which marked the tax-money: "Render unto Cesar the things that are Cesar's, and unto God the things that are God's."\*

So likewise when another question was proposed by the Sadducees, which, as they imagined, reduced the doctrine of a future state to an absurdity, he hesitated not a moment to give an answer so calm and so rational, that nothing can possibly be more unlike the frantic ebullitions of enthusiasm. "Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God. For in the resurrection, they neither marry, nor are given in marriage; but are as the angels of God in heaven. But, as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying; I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living."†

An enthusiast, when attacked by the arm of force, is generally prone to repel violence with violence: and, believing himself to be the immediate favourite of heaven, he not unfrequently, even if his followers be ever so few, will confidently promise to them a certain victory. But, when in defence of his Lord, a zealous disciple wounded one of the servants of the high-priest, Jesus ordered him to forbear; at once declaring the fate of those who should draw the sword in resistance to authority, and intimating the utter needlessness of such a step were he himself inclined to crush his enemies. "Put up

\* Matt. xxii. 15—22.

† Matt. xxii. 23—32.

again thy sword into its place : for all they that take the sword, shall perish with the sword. Thinkest thou, that I cannot now pray to my Father ; and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels ? But how then shall the Scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be ?”\*

An enthusiast, moreover, is very apt to inculcate his doctrines by fire and sword ; as thinking that those deserve no mercy, who can impiously reject what to him appears the undeniable mind of heaven. But the mode of propagating Christianity prescribed by its founder, is the very reverse of such sanguinary proceedings. “As ye go,” said he to his disciples, when he sent them forth, “*preach, saying*, The kingdom of heaven is at hand. Freely ye have received, freely give. Behold, I send you forth as sheep, in the midst of wolves.”† Hence, when two of his disciples would fain have called down fire from heaven upon a Samaritan village, which had refused him admission, he gravely rebuked them for their violence ; intimating, at the same time, that they little knew what spirit they were of : “for the Son of man,” said he, “is not come to destroy men’s lives, but to save them.”‡

Various other instances of Christ’s perfect freedom from enthusiasm might easily be produced : but these may be deemed sufficient. It may safely, in short, be asserted, that not a single mark of fanaticism can be exhibited against him, unless it be the naked circumstance of his claiming to be a prophet sent from God. This, however, according to any just principles of reasoning, cannot be legitimately brought forward as evidence ; because, in truth, it is a complete begging of the question. If, indeed, Christ were *not* sent from God ; then doubtless his claim of a divine commission, made under a full impression of its propriety, would be a most ample proof of enthusiasm : but, on the other hand, if he were *truly* sent from God ; then such a claim would be no proof whatsoever. Hence it is obvious, that the claim in question cannot be legitimately adduced as a proof of enthusiasm, until it be first shewn, that Christ was *not* sent from God : for it is either a strong proof, or no proof at all, exactly according to the character which he *really* sustained.

3. But so singularly was the appearance of Christ mingled with other circumstances, that, in order fully to prosecute the inquiry, whether he was either an impostor or an enthusiast,

\* Matt. xxvi. 51—54.

† Matt. x. 7, 8, 16.

‡ Luke ix. 51—56.



we stand compelled to do much more than merely study his recorded character, whether exemplified in words, or displayed in actions.

Various matters, very difficult to be accounted for by an infidel, stand immediately connected with the appearance of Christ; matters, wholly independent upon him, on the supposition of his being either an impostor or an enthusiast; matters, over which he could not possibly have had the slightest degree of controul.

In the sacred writings of the Jews; writings, which on the fullest evidence we maintain to have been in existence long anterior to the birth of Christ: we have numerous documents, which claim to be divinely inspired prophecies. Now these predictions announce and minutely describe a remarkable character, whom the Jews have ever been accustomed to denominate *the Messiah*, and whom, from a numerical prophecy of Daniel, they were actually expecting immediately before, and about the very time when Christ made his appearance. The prophecies in question teach, among numerous other particulars, that he should be born in Bethlehem; that he should be a descendant of the tribe of Judah, and the house of David; that he should appear during the continuance of the second temple; that the times of his manifestation might be known by computing seventy prophetic weeks, or 490 calendar years from an edict of one of the Persian kings to restore and build Jerusalem at the close of the Babylonian captivity; that, shortly after the end of those 490 years, the city and the sanctuary of the Jews should be destroyed; that one of his familiar friends should betray him; that he should be sold for thirty pieces of silver; that his hands and his feet should be pierced; that his garments should be divided among his oppressors, and that they should cast lots on his vesture; that he should be taken off by an unjust judgment; that his grave should be appointed with the wicked, but that nevertheless his tomb should be with the rich man;\* that he should be despised and rejected of men, but yet that his portion should be the many, and that the mighty people he should share for his spoil;† that he should be a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence to both the houses of Israel, but that in him all the nations of the earth should be blessed.‡

\* See Bp. Lowth on Isaiah liii. 9.

† See Bp. Lowth on Isaiah liii. 12.

‡ Micah v. 2. Gen. xlix. 10. Isaiah xi. 1, 2. Jerem. xxiii. 5, 6. xxxiii. 15. Haggai ii. 6—9. Malach. iii. 1. Dan. ix. 24—27. Psalm

Such are some of the many predictions, which the Jews in all ages have believed to relate to their expected Messiah : and I have specially selected these rather than others, which might have been adduced, because their peculiar nature is such that their accomplishment or non-accomplishment is wholly out of the controul of any person, whether an impostor or an enthusiast, who might think fit to apply them to himself. Thus (that the drift and force of the present argument may be understood) it is readily allowed, that either an impostor or an enthusiast might have affected to accomplish a prophecy of Zechariah, by riding into Jerusalem on an ass ; because an action of this sort would plainly be altogether in his own power : whence no such action, standing in an insulated form, or joined with other actions of a similar description, would be any valid proof that the rider was the promised Messiah. But then it is contended, that neither an impostor nor an enthusiast could have had any controul over the accomplishment of a prediction, which set forth the various circumstances (for instance) of the death of the Messiah ; because no person can certainly determine the several contingencies of his own dissolution : whence it follows, that the exact accomplishment of a prophecy of *this* nature, in the case of one who, during his life-time, had claimed to be the promised Messiah, has a strong tendency to establish the validity of his claim ; and it is obvious, that the greater number there is of such independent coincidences, the stronger is the presumption in favour of the claimant.

On this very intelligible principle, then, let us consider the case of Jesus Christ and the Jewish Messiahship.

In *his* person, it cannot be denied or dissembled, (for, in truth, it is a mere question of matter of fact,) that an amazing number of descriptions, purporting to be prophecies, have been exactly verified ; nor can it be denied or dissembled, that a large proportion of these descriptions, whether they should or should not be verified, are, from the very necessity of their nature, placed wholly out of the controul of any interested adventurer who might choose to assume the character of the predicted Saviour.

What then are we to think of the case before us ? It is quite clear, that neither an enthusiast nor an impostor could so controul independent events, that he should be born in Bethlehem, rather than in any other place ; that one of his inti-

xli. 9. Zechar. xi. 12. Psalm xxii. 16—18. Isaiah liii. 3—12. Isaiah viii. 13, 14. compared with Rom. ix. 33. 1 Pet. ii. 8 : whence it appears, that Christ is the person spoken of by Isaiah. Gen. xxii. 18. xxvi. 4.

mate friends should betray him ; that he should be sold for the precise sum of thirty pieces of silver ; that his death should be attended by the piercing of his hands and his feet ; that his garments should be divided, but that his vesture should be assigned by lot ; that he should be destined to be buried with malefactors, but yet that his tomb should be with a rich man ; that he should be despised and rejected by the Jews, but that he should receive as his spiritual spoil the mighty nations of the pagan world ; that not only should his appearance coincide with a remarkable numerical prophecy, but that shortly after his death the metropolis and temple of his native country should be utterly destroyed by the Romans. Yet did every one of these independent particulars, over which Christ, on the supposition of his being either an impostor or an enthusiast, could plainly have had no sort of controul, meet with fatal exactness in *his* single person. Of his riding into Jerusalem on an ass, I make small account, as an argument : for nothing is more probable, than that this is the precise action which an enthusiast would have selected for his performance. But, of the various circumstances attendant upon his death, I make great account, as an argument ; because I cannot comprehend how either an impostor or an enthusiast, placed in the peculiar circumstances of Christ, could have so ordered matters wholly out of his controul, that they should exactly correspond with certain descriptive prophecies composed many ages even before his own birth.

But this chain of events is not the only one which hampers and perplexes the supposition that Christ was either an enthusiast or an impostor : there is yet another, for which the infidel, on *his* principles, stands bound to account.

If Christ were either an impostor or an enthusiastic pretender to the Messiahship, though he might apply various predictions to himself, and though possibly he might induce others to adopt a similar application ; yet his enthusiasm or his scheme of imposture, must have had a commencement at some one definite point of his life ; and, even had he been so inclined, he could not have commanded the application of prophecies to himself by others during his own infancy. Yet did this very occurrence actually take place. An infidel may assert, that Christ, either as an impostor or as an enthusiast, availed himself of certain old predictions highly venerated among the Jews, and gave himself out to be the person whom they foretold. Now, to say nothing of the insuperable difficulties with which (as we have already seen) this crude notion is clogged, the prophecies were first applied to Christ by *others*,



while *he himself* was yet an infant. Wise men came out of the east to inquire after him, as soon as he was born : Herod and all Jerusalem were troubled about so strange an event : old Simeon in the temple took the child in his arms, and declared that he was the promised Deliverer : and Anna spoke of him, though still an infant, to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem.\* Circumstances of this description, being wholly independent of Christ himself, are plainly incompatible with the theory of his being either an impostor or an enthusiast. He did not merely give *himself* out to be the predicted Messiah : he was declared to be such by *others*, and those neither of his own family nor at all connected with him, while *he* as yet was a child in arms.

We have now patiently gone through the evidence respecting the claims of Christ to the Messiahship of the Hebrews ; and the difficulties that attend upon the only two suppositions by which those claims might be invalidated are so great, that it may well be made a question, whether *to believe him an impostor or an enthusiast*, does not shew an incomparably higher degree of credulity than *to believe him a prophet really sent from God*.

III. The character of the founder of Christianity having been thus fully vindicated, it might seem almost superfluous to discuss the character of his apostles and immediate followers : for, if Christ himself cannot be pronounced either an impostor or an enthusiast, except in despite of all evidence, both moral and historical, it must clearly follow, that neither can any such imputation be reasonably cast upon those who acted in obedience to his commands, and who propagated the identical system which he himself originally promulged. Yet, since the speculations of Infidelity respecting these earliest preachers of the Gospel, are attended with numerous difficulties, it may not be altogether useless to consider their character also.

1. The notion, I presume, which infidel writers, in consistency with their own principles, must entertain of the primitive missionaries of Christianity is this : that they were a combination of artful impostors, tinged in a measure with Jewish obstinacy and enthusiasm, (for the union of fraud and fanaticism is neither rare nor impossible ; ) who, availing themselves of the peculiar circumstances of the times, contrived to erect, upon the infatuated credulity of mankind, an ecclesiastical fabric, which, through the labours of their industrious suc-

\* Matt. ii. 1—6. Luke ii. 25—32, 36—38.



cessors, has since attained its present gigantic magnitude. *These men*, says Mr. Volney, *were robbers and hypocrites: preaching simplicity, to inveigle confidence; humility, the more easily to enslave; poverty, in order to appropriate all riches to themselves; another world, the better to invade this.* He speaks indeed, when he employs such language, of the whole collective body of the Christian clergy: but then he must be understood to include the apostles and the first preachers of the Gospel *within* that body; because, otherwise, his argument is palpably inconclusive. Let us grant to the utmost extent of his wishes, that the priesthood of the middle ages fully answered to his description; and let us further concede for the sake of argument, that the priesthood of the present day are not a whit better than their predecessors: what then? Unless Mr. Volney can prove that the apostles also were men of a like spirit, he will but little, at least with sober-minded and rational inquirers, have advanced his project of overturning Christianity. Because certain unprincipled persons may have availed themselves of the general reception of the Gospel, and the general veneration entertained for its divine founder, and may thence have contrived to erect upon these foundations a rich, and powerful, and thriving spiritual empire: are we therefore logically bound to conclude, that the apostles were *robbers and hypocrites*? The existence of artful and wicked men within the pale of the Christian Church, cannot, by any legitimate process of reasoning with which I am acquainted, demonstrate the falsehood of Christianity itself. For this purpose, had Mr. Volney been a really honest and conscientious investigator, he would not have dealt in a vague indiscriminate abuse of the Christian clergy *in general*: but would have endeavoured to shew, if such a matter could be shewn, that his vituperation was correctly applicable to the apostles *in particular*. Could he have demonstrated, on any secure grounds, that the apostles and the earliest preachers of the Gospel were robbers and hypocrites, preaching simplicity to inveigle confidence; humility, the more easily to enslave; poverty, in order to appropriate all riches to themselves; another world, the better to invade this: could he, I say, have satisfactorily demonstrated any such position; he would also have demonstrated, that the apostles and first teachers, under their peculiar circumstances of being the *original* promulgators of a religious system, were certainly a band of interested impostors. But, unless this can be done, in effect nothing is done. The misconduct of their successors cannot prove the apostles to be impostors: and, unless the apostles can be proved to be im-

postors, Christianity cannot be proved to be a fable. If therefore Mr. Volney wishes to include in his description the whole body of the Christian priesthood, from the apostles down to the present time; a matter clearly necessary to the conclusiveness of his argument: he must give us something more than his own bare assertion, that he has accurately depicted the character of the apostles. And, on the other hand, if he does not wish to include the apostles in his description of the Christian priesthood: then it is hard to comprehend how he has proved the apostles to be impostors, and thence consequentially the Gospel to be a cheat. But Mr. Volney is not very remarkable for close reasoning: his zeal in the cause of irreligion is apt to outrun his judgment.

2. Let us however examine the notion, professedly entertained by infidels, that the primitive missionaries of Christianity were a knot of impostors, whose object was to delude mankind into the belief that they were a company of divinely commissioned teachers.

(1.) Now we readily grant, that, during the life-time of their master, the apostles entertained the ambitious hope, common to them with the rest of their countrymen, that he was about to establish a temporal sovereignty in which his tried adherents might expect the highest places of dignity and emolument.—Christ indeed repeatedly told them, what they might expect in his service; contempt, hatred, bonds, imprisonment, spoliation, persecution, death: but we all know the mode, in which a sanguine temper is wont to operate. It is not impossible, that, from an unwillingness to be disturbed in the midst of a golden dream, they might turn a deaf ear to all such declarations.—Probably they might view them, as somewhat exaggerated: probably they might deem them mere trials of their steadfastness and fidelity, propounded in words, but never meant to be carried into effect: probably they might esteem them, as simply setting forth those preliminary hardships and labours, which they who gird themselves up to a mighty enterprize must contentedly endure in the road to victory. Human nature is ever ingenious, in excogitating agreeable solutions of what in the letter it dislikes to hear. Hence it is not at all impossible, that some such explanations might be sought after, as would leave the disciples of Christ in possession of a blissful dream of worldly aggrandizement. On this principle it was, perhaps, that, even so late as immediately before the last journey to Jerusalem, Peter, in the name of his fellows, undertook, as it were, to make terms with his master. *Behold*, said that apostle, magnifying his deserts and apparently expecting an ample

temporal reward: *Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee: what shall we have therefore?* To this question the answer of Jesus was, that they should indeed be promoted to the highest dignities in his kingdom, that they should be abundantly remunerated for every sacrifice; but that they must look for these rewards only in a future and eternal world. *Verily I say unto you, that ye, which have followed me, in the regeneration, when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And every one, that hath forsaken houses or brethren or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands for my name's sake, shall receive an hundred fold, and shall inherit everlasting life.\**

But, whatever expectations of this sort were formed during the life-time of Christ, they must have been speedily dissipated by his unwelcome death. And so, in fact, they were. After the trifling resistance which one of his followers made upon his apprehension in the garden, *all the disciples*, we are told, *forsook him and fled.*† With his crucifixion every hope vanished. *We are talking*, said one of them, full of sad musings and dismal apprehensions: *we are talking concerning Jesus of Nazareth, which was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people: and how the chief priest and our rulers delivered him to be condemned to death, and have crucified him.—But we trusted, that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel.*‡ The turn of the expression implies, that expectation was at an end, and that the bitterness of disappointment had succeeded. Christ's disciples had once indeed believed, that he was the promised Messiah: but the circumstance of his death had led them to suspect, that they had been grievously mistaken in their opinion.

Thus terminated the first stage of that, which, in the judgment of Infidelity, is an imposition upon the credulity of mankind.

(2.) Here, we might suppose, that the matter would have ended: for, when an unsuccessful impostor is cut off in the midst of his project, we constantly find, that the project itself becomes abortive, that his followers are dispersed, and that nothing more is heard or thought of the affair. Such was the case with the several deceptions attempted by Theudas and Judas of Galilee and Coziba:‖ and such we might reasonably anticipate from analogy, would have been the case with

\* Matt. xix. 27—29.

† Luke xxiv. 19—21.

‡ Matt. xxvi. 56.

‖ Acts. v. 36—37.



Christianity, had its author been a mere ambitious adventurer.

But, in truth, the direct opposite to this anticipation took place. Very shortly after the death of Christ, his disciples, lately so dispirited, most unaccountably, on the principles of an infidel, resumed their courage : and, what is not a little paradoxical and extraordinary, they displayed their recovered courage on grounds altogether different from those on which they had heretofore exhibited so much confidence. During the life-time of their master they thought of nothing but a temporal kingdom ; and overlooked his sufficiently explicit declarations, that in his service they must expect hatred and contempt and persecution : but, after his death, we find their tone suddenly changed ; for now the prominent object of their ambition was an eternal kingdom in a future world, and they even welcomed all those severe trials which had been announced as their earthly portion. Henceforth we hear nothing more of any worldly and interested and selfish projects. They seem wholly absorbed in the plan of announcing, every where and to every body, their crucified preceptor ; as one whose office it was to save his people from their sins, to break the tyrannous yoke of evil passions, and to conduct his faithful disciples to heaven by the road of much affliction upon earth. In the prosecution of such a plan, which, overlooking this present and visible world, solely respects a world future and invisible ; they are content to endure sufferings, from which human nature revolts. With *them*, the approbation or disapprobation of man is of little account : they seek only the praise of God, fully satisfied with this, though deprived of every thing else. In poverty, distress, obloquy, and martyrdom, they profess to exult : for the hatred and opposition of their countrymen they stand prepared ; since, how could they expect favour and countenance at the hands of those, who had already crucified their venerated master ? They are willing to lose all and to resign all, character, wealth, comfort, life, in the discharge of what they believe to be a bounden duty : and, as for recompence, the only remuneration, which they seek or desire, is the beatific vision of their murdered and disgraced Lord in the future world of spirits. What they profess themselves, they teach to others. They freely invite all mankind to the participation of a life of misery and trouble and persecution : they affect not to conceal, that their master was ignominiously executed as a malefactor : they dissemble not the contempt and hatred and ruin of all worldly projects, which those who follow them, must prepare to encounter : but then, as an allurement to those whom they



address, they promise them abundance of comfort and happiness hereafter, when death shall have removed them from their present sphere of existence.

“The God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob,” their language was, “the God of our fathers, hath glorified his son Jesus ; whom ye delivered up, and denied him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let him go. But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you, and killed the Prince of life. And now, brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers. But those things, which God before had shewed by the mouth of all his prophets that Christ should suffer, he hath so fulfilled. Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord ; and he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you : whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began. Ye are the children of the prophets and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham ; And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed. Unto you first, God having raised up his son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities.\* We ought to obey God, rather than men. The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.† And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify, that it is he which was ordained of God to be the judge of quick and dead. To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name, whosoever believeth in him, shall receive remission of sins.‡ It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you : but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles. For so hath the Lord commanded us, saying : I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth.¶ The times of this ignorance God winked at ; but now commandeth all men every where to repent : because he hath appointed a day in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained ; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in

\* Acts iii. 13—26.

† Acts x. 42, 43.

+ Acts v. 29—31.

¶ Acts xiii. 46, 47.

that he hath raised him from the dead.\* Ye know, from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons ; serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and with many tears, and with temptations which beset me by the lying in wait of the Jews : and how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you ; but have shewed you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house, testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Gentiles, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. And now, behold, I go bound in the Spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there ; save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying, that bonds and afflictions abide me. But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus to testify the Gospel of the grace of God. And now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified. I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel. Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me.† I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.‡ What then shall we say to these things ? If God be for us, who can be against us ? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things ? Who shall separate us from the love of Christ ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or the sword ? As it is written : For thy sake we are killed all the day long ; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.¶ If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.§ We are troubled on every side, yet not depressed ; we are perplexed, but not in despair ; persecuted, but not forsaken ; cast down, but not destroyed ; always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh. We believe, and therefore speak ; knowing that he which raised up the Lord Jesus, shall raise up us also by Jesus, and shall present us with you. For which cause we faint not : but though our outward man

\* Acts xvii. 30, 31.

† Acts xx. 18—34.

‡ Rom. viii. 18.

¶ Rom. viii. 31—37.

§ 1 Corinth. xv. 19.

perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal. For we must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad. Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men.\* The preaching of the cross is to them that perish, foolishness; but unto us which are saved, it is the power of God. For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: but we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling-block, and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ and him crucified.† God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.‡ I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not even as others which have no hope. For, if we believe that Jesus died and rose again; even so them also which sleep in Jesus, will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord, shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we, which are alive and remain, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words.||' For we know, that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.§ For here we have no continuing city, but we seek one to come.¶ Blessed is the man that endureth temptation; for, when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.”\*\*

These were the avowed principles of the first teachers of

\* 2 Corinth. iv. 8—18. v. 10, 11. † 1 Corinth. i. 18, 22—24. ii. 2.

‡ Galat. vi. 14.

|| 1 Thes. iv. 13—18.

§ 2 Corinth. v. 1.

¶ Heb. xiii. 14.

\*\* James i. 12.



Christianity; principles, adopted and faithfully acted upon by all their proselytes. The result was such as might naturally be anticipated in the existing state of society; and as, in fact, *was* anticipated by the zealous missionaries themselves. From the concurring testimony of Christian documents and pagan declarations, we gather, that in every quarter of the world they were hated, reviled, despised, traduced, persecuted, plundered, and murdered with every refinement of the most ingenious cruelty. Instead of gaining any worldly advantages to themselves; they sacrificed all their hopes and all their comforts on this side of the grave to the furtherance of a project, which, in the eyes of an infidel, was a mere gross imposition upon human credulity. They were tortured, not accepting deliverance: they had trials of cruel mockings and scourgings, of bonds and imprisonment. They were stoned; they were sawn asunder; they were tempted; they were slain with the sword; they were committed to the flames; they were crucified; they were exposed to the fury of wild beasts, for the amusement of a brutal populace; they were destitute, afflicted, tormented; they wandered in deserts and in mountains, in dens and caves of the earth. In labours they were abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons frequent, in deaths oft, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by the Jews, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in journeyings often, in fastings often, in hunger and thirst, in cold and nakedness. Of all the apostles, one only died a natural death; the rest were slaughtered under various circumstances of cruelty, and in various regions of the earth, to which their zeal had transported them.

Now the whole of this was done and suffered, if we may safely receive the conclusions of Infidelity, for the purpose of deluding mankind into the belief of a fiction. The actors and the sufferers in this strange eventful history, were manifest impostors: and as such, they of necessity *knew*, that they were palming an imposition upon the world. Yet, though they *knew* the whole to be a mere cheat, so delighted were they with the idle figment, that they cheerfully submitted to misery and contempt, to torture and death, in order that they might persuade others to receive for truth what they themselves all the while knew to be a gross fabrication. Nor was this extraordinary affection for pain, and ignominy, and discomfort, and labour, and slaughter, confined to some one single person: no less than twelve principal leaders, besides a numerous



host of inferior agents, were characterized by the same unnatural appetite for death and wretchedness. All these, or at any rate all the twelve, knew full well, that there was not a word of truth in the pretended revelation which they took so much pains to promulgate; they knew, likewise, that instead of gaining any worldly advantages by their labour, they were absolutely bringing themselves to certain ruin: yet, with rare unanimity did they persist in their career; not the slightest confession would any one of them make; not the least hesitation was evinced, when the alternative of death or recantation was set before them.

All this must be maintained by Infidelity, if it be asserted that the primitive teachers of Christianity were impostors. Every part of the conduct of the apostles, every page of their writings, shews most indisputably, that they themselves sincerely believed the truth of what they taught: yet, in defiance of the strongest possible moral evidence, in defiance of the first principles of our sensitive nature, such is the credulity of the infidel, that he finds it more easy to deem them impostors, than to acknowledge them as the inspired messengers of heaven.

3. It will be asked, what, at this second stage of the propagation of the Gospel, could have specially induced the apostles and their companions to act the part which they did act. On the death of their master, they were scattered: and their whole conduct and language at that time shewed, that they had given up in despair the project of procuring his acknowledgment in the character of the promised Messiah. Yet, suddenly, their despair was changed into confidence: and, notwithstanding he had been violently removed from them, they still persisted in maintaining that he was the great prophet whom their countrymen were then universally expecting. What could produce this extraordinary revival of a project, when all hope seemed to have been previously extinguished?

Christ himself, we are told, had ventured to predict, during his life-time, that although the chief priests and the scribes would deliver him to the Gentiles, for the purpose of effecting his crucifixion, he would nevertheless rise again the third day.\* This prophecy was no secret, nor was the knowledge of it by any means confined to his own disciples: on the contrary, it was speedily divulged; and soon came to the ears of his determined enemies, the chief priests and Pharisees. Thus fortunately placed upon their guard, they now had it in their

\* Matt. xx. 18, 19.

power to bring his pretensions to an easy issue. Accordingly, the day after his burial, they came together to Pilate, in order that the necessary precautions might be taken against any fraudulent attempt to bring about an apparent accomplishment of the prophecy. *Sir, said they, we remember that that deceiver said, while he was yet alive, after three days I will rise again. Command, therefore, that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day; lest his disciples come by night, and steal him away, and say unto the people; He is risen from the dead. So the last error shall be worse than the first.\** No arrangement could have been better conceived. Christ had publicly declared, that he would rise again on the third day. Nothing more, therefore, was necessary to confute his pretensions, even on his own principles, than to convince the whole nation that he did *not* then rise again: and, to secure this confutation, the only thing requisite was to set a guard, who should effectually prevent any trick on the part of the disciples, and who should thus enable the Jewish high-priests to exhibit the dead body after the specified time had fully elapsed.—The declaration of Christ was public: and the precautions taken were equally public. Hence the matter was brought to a regular issue; and the entire question, *whether he was or was not the Messiah*, hung suspended on the naked fact, *whether he did or did not rise again on the third day*.

What then happened, when the fated third day arrived? It is natural to expect, if the Gospel were an imposture, that the dead body of Christ would have been produced and triumphantly exhibited, to the entire conviction of every rational inquirer, and to the utter confusion of his now confessedly deluded followers. This was the obvious course for the high-priests and the Pharisees to take: and indeed all the precautions, to which they had previously resorted, plainly enough shewed that they meant to take this course. Did they then take it? Nothing of the sort. Notwithstanding the guard of Roman soldiers which had been set to watch the sepulchre and to prevent the possibility of any fraud on the part of the disciples, the body was missing and could not be produced. Such was the fact: and the problem was, how this fact was to be satisfactorily accounted for.

The story told by the Jewish rulers was, that the disciples of Christ came by night and stole away the body while the soldiers slept: and their statement was corroborated by the declaration of the soldiers themselves.

\* Matt. xxvii. 63, 64.

This mode of accounting for the disappearance of the dead body seems, at first not a little plausible: but, if examined somewhat more closely, it is by no means unattended with serious difficulties. The soldiers well knew for what purpose they had been stationed; for no less extraordinary a purpose than to see whether a dead man would be restored to life, and would come forth from the sepulchre in which he had been laid. Hence, when we consider the ordinary workings of superstition in regard to a reappearance of the dead, and when we duly weigh the thrilling curiosity which the duty imposed upon the soldiers could not but excite, we must of necessity think it rather incredible, that not merely a single individual of the guard, careless and incurious, should have dropped asleep, but that the whole company, with one accord, should have been seized with this unaccountable and most inopportune somnolency. Nor is this the only difficulty. The sepulchre was not a mere grave dug in soft and yielding mould, which might easily be opened without any unusual noise; but it was hewn out in a rock, and was secured by a great stone with which its mouth was carefully closed. Such being the case, it is clear, that the disciples could not steal the body without rolling away the stone; and it is equally clear, that they could not roll away the stone without producing a very considerable noise. Yet so sound and deep was the sleep of the Roman soldiers, one and all, if we may credit the Jewish account of the matter, that not a single person awoke, though the rumbling of a huge stone violently put in motion was sounding full in their ears, and though the trampling bustle of removing a dead body was going on in their very presence. The story now begins to look somewhat suspicious and incredible: for the reception of it involves facts which are enough to stagger even the most determined belief. But another unaccountable circumstance yet remains behind. The severity of Roman discipline is well known: death was the punishment of the centinel who slept upon guard: yet not one of these most culpably negligent soldiers was animadverted upon. That Pilate and the Jewish rulers would be alike provoked at the disappointment which they had experienced through the careless drowsiness of the watch, cannot for a moment be doubted: whence it can be as little doubted, that they would be eager and prompt to wreak their vengeance upon the culprits. Not one of them, however, received the least punishment: instead of their lives being forfeited, they were seen at large just as if they had committed no military offence whatsoever. And now let any person, accustomed to weigh legal evidence, put these



several circumstances together; and then say whether the Jewish story does not wear fraud and suspicion upon its very face. So ill does it hang together, that it would not, I am persuaded, for a single moment be admitted in any court of law, as affording sufficient ground to build a decision upon.

Such was the Jewish mode of accounting for a fact, in the truth of which all parties were agreed; the fact of *the disappearance of the dead body*: let us next attend to the Christian mode.

Jesus, as it was universally known, had foretold that he would rise again on the third day: on this third day his dead body was not to be found; and his lately terrified and scattered disciples now came boldly forward, and declared that he had actually risen from the dead, and had thus accomplished his own prophecy. Their declaration rested upon the alleged circumstance, that they themselves had repeatedly seen him and conversed with him, and even eaten with him, and handled him: and so fully did they seem impressed with the truth of their testimony, that from this time all their courage returned, and they boldly preached him as the promised Messiah, on the express ground of his resurrection. Nor was the assertion made scantily and hesitatingly. On all occasions, and without the least reserve, was the alleged fact brought forward, from the very first, with the utmost degree of prominence, and as the very corner stone of their whole system.\*

Here, therefore, we must make our choice between the two accounts of the matter, respectively given by the Jewish rulers and the disciples of Christ. If we prefer that which is given by the Jewish rulers, we must be content to take it with all its accompanying difficulties; if we adopt that which is given by the disciples of Christ, we must acknowledge that Christ himself rose from the dead, and by consequence that the Gospel is a revelation from heaven.

Now, even as the argument is here stated, I am inclined to think, on the ordinary principles of legal evidence, that an adoption of the account given by the Jewish rulers would evince a higher degree of credulity than an adoption of the account given by the disciples of Christ: but, in truth, the argument has not hitherto been stated in its full force. As yet, I have merely given the testimony of the disciples, in opposition to the badly cohering testimony of the Jewish rulers: I have said nothing as to the grounds and reasons, on which

\* See Acts ii. 22—36. iii. 12—18. iv. 5—12. v. 27—32. x. 36—43. xiii. 23—41. xvii. 31. xxvi. 6—8. 1 Corinth. xv. 3—20.



the testimony of the disciples is rendered credible and worthy of our acceptance. On this point I will readily allow, that the testimony of interested witnesses is to be received with caution: and the disciples may doubtless, in some sort, be called *interested witnesses*; because the whole success of the project, in which they had embarked, depended upon the alleged fact of the resurrection of their Master. Why then are we to believe the disciples on their own naked testimony, when their success so plainly depended on the reception of that testimony.

The foundation of our rational belief I take to be this. Christ either rose from the dead, or he did not rise from the dead: and, analogously, the disciples themselves either knew that they spoke the truth, or were conscious that they advanced a positive falsehood. If we admit them to have spoken the truth, there is an end of the argument at once: if we suppose them to have advanced a positive falsehood, we must at the same time take up and defend the following positions also. By the hypothesis, the disciples advanced a positive falsehood. But if they advanced a positive falsehood, they must have advanced it, knowing all the while that they were advancing an absolute untruth. Now, on the strength of this known and absolute untruth, those who were recently terrified; one into a denial of his master, and the rest into a cowardly abandonment of him, suddenly come forward, in the very face of the people and their rulers, firm and undaunted, and mutually consistent. With astonishing steadiness and resolution, they declare the known falsehood on all occasions. Not one of them wavers or prevaricates in his story; though more than five hundred persons are concerned in the fraud, all asserting that with their own eyes they have seen Christ after his pretended resurrection: \* not a single witness out of so many ever comes forward to confess the shameful imposture; though males and females, apostles and disciples, are alike concerned in it. The object of their singular pertinacity, in thus promulging and maintaining a known falsehood, is the establishment of a system, which, as they are fully aware, exposes them to hatred, contempt, destitution, discomfort, persecution, tortures, and death: and so strangely are they enamoured of what they themselves all the while *know* to be a gross fabrication of their own, quite destitute even of a shadow of truth; that, for the pleasure of making the world at large believe a *conscious* falsehood, they are ready to sacrifice every thing, and to lay down

\* 1 Corinth. xv. 3—7.

even their lives under the most aggravated circumstances of insult and cruelty.

These are the articles of belief concomitant upon the hypothesis that Christ never in truth rose from the dead, that the apostles were impostors, and that the whole account of the resurrection was a tale *known* to be a falsehood by the very promulgers themselves. If a man can admit such articles; and every infidel, on his own principles, stands pledged to admit them: he is certainly prepared, by a portentous credulity, to swallow, with the greediness of a depraved appetite, each absurdity which may be offered to him.

It is on this foundation that we rationally admit the evidence of the apostles, in regard to the fact of the resurrection; while we reject, as palpably inconsistent and suspicious, the evidence of the Jewish rulers. But, if the fact of the resurrection be once admitted, every thing else follows as a matter of course: Christ was indeed a prophet sent from God; the apostles were true men, not impostors; the Gospel is no fraud upon the credulity of mankind, but a genuine revelation from heaven.

4. Such are the arguments furnished by an attentive examination of the conduct pursued by the apostolic college at large: others are additionally furnished by the conduct of two apostles in particular, which strike me as being so cogent that they ought not to be omitted in a discussion of the present nature. The individuals to whom I allude, are Judas the traitor and Paul the persecutor.

(1.) With respect to Judas, he is mentioned at an early period of the history, as being one of those twelve select disciples, to whom Christ added as associates seventy other persons of an inferior rank and authority, and whom he sent out for the purpose of announcing to the house of Israel the near approach of his kingdom. These, having travelled from city to city, and having met with great success in the discharge of their commission, returned to him, we are told, with joy, on account of the prosperous issue of their undertaking.\* Among them, of course, was Judas: and the whole of his conduct seems to have given general satisfaction; for we find him afterwards acting the part of treasurer to the infant community; a circumstance which implies that he was reckoned a man worthy of entire confidence.† Such being the case, we cannot reasonably doubt, that whatever might be the true nature and object of the scheme contrived and carrying on by Christ

\* Matt. x. 1—7. Luke x. 1—20.

† John xii. 6. xiii. 29.

and his twelve principal followers, Judas must have been thoroughly acquainted with it : that is to say, if the whole party were on good grounds fully persuaded that Christ was indeed a prophet sent from God, Judas must have known the universal belief and opinion ; and, on the other hand, if they were conscious joint accomplices in the propagation of what was hoped might prove a lucrative imposture, Judas could not but have been in the secret.

This man, instigated partly by the love of money, partly by disappointed ambition, and partly (it should seem) by anger, on account of his having been openly denounced as a traitor in the presence of his fellows, agreed with the chief priests, for the sum of thirty pieces of silver, to betray his master into their hands. The money was paid : and Judas duly executed his detestable purpose. Christ was apprehended : and, after having been subjected to the forms of a mock trial, was ignominiously put to death.

Under such circumstances, if Christianity had been an imposture, what would have been the obvious and natural procedure of Judas ? As one of the accomplices, he must have *known* that it was an imposture. Hence, as a deserter from the scheme, at the same time that he betrayed its author, or at all events after the death of its author, he would have unfolded the entire project to his employers. His evidence would have been of the very last importance : for how could an imposture be more completely detected and exposed, than by the voluntary confession of an accomplice ? To the high priests, therefore, such an instrument would plainly have been of incalculable value : for his evidence would at once have laid open all the hidden wheels of a hated fraud, and would have fully justified the proceedings of the Jewish rulers both to the people at large, and to their own consciences in particular. Nor would his confession have been more desirable to the priests, than beneficial to himself. The character of an informer and a betrayer is always odious. Yet, if Judas had appeared as the repentant and conscientious revealer of a nefarious fraud, through which an impostor was to be impiously palmed upon the nation as their promised Messiah ; his honest treachery might not only have been pardoned, but would even have assumed the venerable aspect of zealous sanctity. On every account, in short, we may be morally sure, that if any imposture had been carrying on, Judas must have known it, and would have openly revealed it.

His evidence, however, was at no time brought forward by the Jewish rulers. He appeared not on the trial of Christ,



when his confession would have been so naturally and fitly produced in full court. He is mentioned not subsequent to the trial, as having left such a confession on record. False witnesses were anxiously sought after, in order that there might be some decent plea for the condemnation of the alleged impostor; and two at length were found, who testified to his having said, *I am able to destroy the temple of God and to build it in three days* :\* but respecting the all-important and decisive evidence of the penitent accomplice Judas, we hear not a syllable. For some reason or another, the man who most especially could have thrown a full and distinct light upon the dark fraud in which he himself had been actively engaged, is never once produced. In all their anxiety to find proper witnesses, the high priests, it appears, most unaccountably never once thought of summoning their useful instrument Judas. This wretched tool, stung by remorse, afterwards hanged himself : but the suicide had not been committed, when Christ was brought before the council ; he did the deed only when he saw that his master was condemned.† Hence his inopportune death cannot be alleged as the reason of his non-appearance upon the trial. Why then was he not brought forward as an evidence that Christ was an impostor, and that his new religion was a cheat ? Clearly because he had no such testimony to give ; which yet he *must* have had, if the Gospel had been a well known fraud. Instead of adventuring any impeachment of his master's character, when he restored to his employers the wages of iniquity ; he openly confessed his own guilt, and his Lord's integrity : *I have sinned, in that I have betrayed the innocent blood*.‡ Here we have the solution of the otherwise inexplicable circumstance, that the evidence of Judas, as to *Christ being an impostor, and Christianity a cheat*, has at no time been produced : neither *on the trial*, which would doubtless have been the most appropriate season ; nor *after the trial*, which might haply have supplied the defect occasioned by an unfortunate inadvertence on the part of the managers.

(2.) The argument, afforded by the conduct of the apostle Paul, is equally strong with that afforded by the conduct of the miserable Judas, though happily of a more pleasing description. In the case of Judas, we have the testimony of a friend converted into an enemy : in the case of Paul, we have the testimony of an enemy converted into a friend.

\* Matt. xxvi. 59—61.

† Matt. xxvii. 3—5.

‡ Matt. xxvii. 3, 4.



Among the bigoted opponents of infant Christianity, none was more conspicuous than this very remarkable character. As he states respecting himself, he *lived a Pharisee after the strictest sect of the Jewish religion;\** brought up at the feet of his learned master Gamaliel, taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers, and zealous above measure toward the God of his ancestors.† It was this identical zeal which led him to persecute the adherents of the nascent sect. He viewed them as impious apostates from the true faith: he dreaded the diffusion of their pernicious heresy: and he believed himself, most honestly and uprightly, to be strictly in his line of duty toward the God of his fathers, while labouring to exterminate the novel doctrines and upstart followers of a crucified impostor. Under such an impression, we find him performing the devout act of guarding the clothes of the witnesses, when they threw them aside, that so they might the more conveniently stone the blasphemer Stephen;‡ and, under the same impression, we hear of his *making havoc of the Church, entering into every house, and haling men and women to prison.*||

Thus qualified by a blind and vehement zeal for the work of persecution, and breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of Christ, he readily procured from the high-priest letters of commendation to the synagogues at Damascus; that, if he should find any of the hated sect, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.§ On this expedition, accordingly, he set forth: but, instead of executing his purpose, we find him suddenly become *himself* a convert to Christianity, and preaching with strenuous fervour the very system of religion which he so lately sought to exterminate. Nor, though sudden, was the change transitory; as might have been readily expected, from an ardent, though fickle character. He persevered in the same course to the end of his days: he traversed the Roman empire in all directions, for the purpose of making converts, and founding churches among the Gentiles; he laboured more abundantly than all the original apostles; he braved the hatred and contempt of the powerful party which he had forsaken; he encountered poverty, hardships, persecutions, difficulties, wherever he went; he was satisfied to be deemed the offscouring of all things; he, a man of talent and education, shrank not from the reproach of folly and madness; he was content to sacrifice all his reasonable prospects of advancement in this

\* Acts xxvi. 5.

† Acts xxii. 3.

‡ Acts vii. 58, 59. viii. 1.

|| Acts viii. 3.

§ Acts ix. 1, 2.

life ; and at length he testified his sincerity, by freely suffering death in the cause of the religion which at first he had so hastily, and (to all appearance) so inconsiderately embraced. Many of his letters are extant, addressed to various churches, which he had himself founded ; and in these we may read his views and principles very plainly and unequivocally set forth. From them we collect, that he was animated with the warmest love to Christ ; whom yet he had never seen during his abode upon earth, and whom at one time he hated and persecuted with the most intense antipathy : that the great object of his life was to induce all mankind to acknowledge, as a divine teacher and Saviour, the identical person whom he himself had denounced as a blasphemer and an impostor ; that the disciples of Christ he loved as his brethren, though he had lately hated them as his worst enemies ; that he confidently built all his own hopes of happiness in a better world on the alleged meritoriousness of one, whom, at a former period, he had deemed a sacriligious innovator upon the heaven-delivered law of his ancestors ; that he spoke in terms of the strongest abhorrence respecting his own previous conduct, when he was persecuting the followers of Christ, representing himself as a blasphemer and injurious, and less than the very least of the apostles ; though, at one time, he believed such conduct to be the most effectual mode of serving and pleasing God ; that he considered his own countrymen as in a state of blindness, merely because they entertained the self-same opinions respecting the novel system of religion which he had himself once entertained ; and that he was quite confident as to the fact of Christ's resurrection ; though his whole previous conduct shews incontrovertibly his prior belief, that no such resurrection had really taken place, but that the body had disappeared through some undoubted, though inexplicable contrivance of the disciples. His whole character, in short, we may read, delineated to the life by his own hand : and, as to his actions, the greater part of the historical narrative, which appears as a supplement to the four parallel gospels, is occupied in the detail of them.

Such was Paul, once a persecutor, afterward the zealous preacher of the faith which he had sought to destroy.

Now, it is obvious, that in the case of any person, much more in the case of a learned and well educated man, so extraordinary a change of principle and practice could not have occurred, except from some adequate cause. The change too is the more remarkable, from its suddenness. One moment, he is journeying on the work of extermination ; another mo-

ment, he sees things under a totally different aspect ; and becomes just as eager to build up, as he was before eager to pull down. What then was the cause of this sudden, yet permanent change ? for when we see an extraordinary effect, we are irresistibly led to seek an adequate cause.

Paul himself always and invariably persisted in one story. "I verily thought with myself," said he, when speaking before Festus and Agrippa, "that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Which thing I also did in Jerusalem : and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests : and, when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them. And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme ; and, being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities. Whereupon, as I went to Damascus, with authority and commission from the chief priest, at mid-day, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me, and them which journeyed with me. And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me ? It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. And I said, Who art thou, Lord ? And he said, I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest. But rise, and stand upon thy feet ; for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness, both of these things which thou hast seen, and of things in the which I will appear unto thee ; delivering thee from the people and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me. Whereupon, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision : but shewed, first unto them of Damascus and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance. Having, therefore, obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come ; that Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should shew light unto the people, and unto the Gentiles."\*

This narrative, if we suppose it to be accurate, will indeed

\* Acts xxvi. 9—23. Compare Acts xxii. 3—21. Gal. i. 11—24.



account most fully for the wonderful and permanent change which took place in the principles and conduct of Paul : but in itself it is so extraordinary, that, upon the first perusal of it, we are scarcely surprised at the exclamation of Festus : " Paul, thou art beside thyself, much learning doth make thee mad."\* Yet, if we attentively consider the whole case, we shall perhaps find the rejection of it encumbered with greater difficulties than the admission of it ; whence we may possibly find, that it is an easier matter to believe than to disbelieve the apostle.

The reasons for admitting the truth of his narrative, extraordinary as it may be, are these :

It precisely and completely accounts for the otherwise inexplicable fact of his sudden transmutation from an unbeliever and a persecutor, to a believer and an apostle.

It is corroborated by the previous character of Paul : for, whether we view him as a scholar or bigot, we are utterly at a loss to comprehend what his motives could be for fabricating a tale which ran directly counter both to all his original prejudices, and to the object on which he was specially engaged at the time when he professed to have seen the vision.

It is corroborated by the subsequent conduct of Paul : for, if it were a mere fabrication, he would not have shaped his whole life in conformity to what he himself knew to be a lie, nor would he finally have suffered martyrdom for a conscious falsehood.

It is confirmed by persons who witnessed the alleged vision as well as Paul himself : for he was not alone, when he professed to have seen it ; his attendants beheld the light, and indistinctly heard the voice which he heard distinctly, and were speechless, and were afraid, and were all, as well as the apostle, struck down to the ground ; they perceived likewise its effects exemplified in the person of Paul, for he became blind, and they themselves were compelled to lead him by the hand to Damascus. Hence, had his narrative been false, they both could and would have contradicted it.

On the other hand, they who deny the truth of the narrative, stand pledged, by the very act of their denial, to maintain the following paradoxical articles of belief :

They must believe, that a bigoted and inveterate enemy of Christianity, at the very time when he was breathing out threatenings and slaughter against its professors, chose to fabricate a gross falsehood, in order that he might use it as a plea for

\* Acts xxvi. 24.



embracing the very religion which he heartily despised, and which he furiously hated.

They must believe, that for the purpose of accomplishing this project, he sacrificed every hope of promotion among the ruling men of his country, and embraced a life of mingled obloquy and labour.

They must believe, that although he hated Christianity in his heart, and deemed it a mere imposture, yet he falsely pretended to have had a vision of its crucified author ; and, in support of this known falsehood, and in furtherance of this hated religion, which all the while he viewed as an imposture, he was finally well satisfied to lay down his life.

They must believe, that a sudden change of a most extraordinary nature took place both in his principles and in his practice, not in consequence of any rational examination of the claims of Christianity to be admitted as a revelation from heaven, but without the least assignable reason of any description whatever ; for, if the preternatural vision be denied which he himself constantly adduced as the reason of his conversion, no other reason can be discovered : that is to say, they must believe in the existence of an effect without a cause.

They must believe, that in his new principles and practice, he persevered with the utmost constancy for a long term of years, despised, and persecuted, and reviled, and harassed ; though he himself knew them to be founded solely on a falsehood of his own fabrication, and though they were in the highest degree adverse to his temporal interest and comfort.

They must believe, that although he invariably stated the occurrence of the vision to have taken place in broad daylight, in the public high-way between Jerusalem and Damascus, and in the presence of several other persons who were travelling with him on the same errand of persecution ; yet not one of these persons, all of whom were enemies of Christianity, and therefore well inclined to detect every attempt at imposture, ever came forward to confront him, by declaring that the whole story was an impudent fabrication.

They must believe, in short, that a man both of eminent learning and of strong prejudices against Christianity, to the amazement of the whole world, suddenly and unaccountably commenced a career altogether opposite to his former principles ; that, in this career without any assignable cause, he persevered through his whole life ; and that at length he submitted to be put to death, rather than he would give up a set of opinions, which contradicted all the sentiments imbibed during

his education, and which he had adopted wholly without reason.\*

Now the persons, who can bring themselves to believe such a monstrous tissue of absurdities rather than admit the reality of an occurrence vouched for by a man at the expense both of his comfort and of his life, may, I think, be justly charged with being under the influence of a blind credulity: and, as the rejection or admission of the Gospel is suspended upon the alternative, it may be safely asserted, as it has already been more than once asserted, that there is greater credulity in the disbelief of Christianity than in the belief of it.

\* For a full discussion of this important subject, see Lord Lytton's *Observations on the conversion and apostleship of St. Paul*. I have selected and illustrated what seems to me the main strength of the argument: but the subsidiaries, so well urged by his lordship, ought not to be passed over without due attention by any really candid and serious inquirer.

Should it be said by an infidel, that the alleged vision, which effected the conversion of St. Paul, was merely a luminous meteor attended with a loud explosion; a solution of the difficulty, which, I believe, has sometimes been resorted to: it will be found, that such a mode of accounting for the matter is hampered with scarcely fewer impediments, than an absolute denial of any extraordinary appearance whatever.

1. For, in the first place, if this solution be adopted, the whole charge of imposture, in the case of St. Paul, is at once virtually relinquished; and he must henceforth be set down as a truly honest man, who, having unluckily mistaken a natural for a supernatural phenomenon, was in consequence led to embrace and propagate the Christian system.—Let such a theory then be adopted; and let us allow, for the sake of argument, that the apostle was innocently deceived; still every other proof, that the Gospel was a divine revelation, remains in full force; nor will the harmless mistake of St. Paul, which happened to be the moving cause of his conversion, invalidate a single argument which has been independently adduced.

2. But, in the second place, the solution is inadequate to account for the result. Paul verily believed, that, in the persecution of the Christians, he was doing God laudable service. Hence, had he mistaken a natural for a supernatural phenomenon, and had he viewed what he beheld as an omen or token from heaven; he would, in *his* frame of mind and with *his* strong convictions that he was doing his duty, have deemed it a manifest sign, not of the divine disapprobation, but of the divine approbation. The sight itself he would have turned his own way, and would have interpreted it in accordance with his own prepossessions. It would have confirmed him in his purpose, not have diverted him from it. Or, if the circumstance of his being struck with blindness should be alleged as a matter likely to give his thoughts a different turn: in that case, be it observed, his blindness cannot be admitted without a concomitant admission of his miraculous and sudden restoration from blindness at the prayer of the Christian Ananias; an event, which no persuasion of the truth of the Gospel on the part of Paul could in itself have been sufficient to bring about.

## SECTION VI.

THE DIFFICULTIES ATTENDANT UPON DEISTICAL INFIDELITY IN REGARD TO THE RAPID PROPAGATION OF CHRISTIANITY AND THE EVIDENCE BY WHICH THE PERFORMANCE OF MIRACLES IS SUPPORTED.

THAT Christianity is now received, as an undoubted revelation from heaven, by the greater part of the civilized world; and that it spread, in a wonderfully short space of time from the death of its original founder, not only over the Roman Empire, but likewise through nations without the verge of that mighty sovereignty: are facts, which, as they cannot be dissembled, are not attempted to be denied by the infidel.

If then Christianity were an imposture, we are naturally led to ask, how it happened to have such extraordinary and permanent success, and how it could command a vitality so unlike the brief duration of most other impostures.

I. An inquiry of this nature could not easily be omitted by an historian, who himself had unhappily imbibed the principles of Infidelity. The fact of the rapid spread of Christianity was not to be dissembled: consistency therefore required, that by such a writer it should be accounted for, independently of every idea of the divine support and concurrence.

In pursuance of this project, Mr. Gibbon undertakes to assign five reasons, why the Christian religion might easily diffuse itself far and wide, even if we suppose it to have been nothing more than a specious imposture.

The reasons alleged by him as sufficient to account for such a circumstance, are the following: 1. the inflexible and intolerable zeal of the Christians, derived, it is true, from the Jewish religion, but purified from the narrow and unsocial spirit, which, instead of inviting, had deterred the Gentiles from embracing the Law of Moses; 2. the doctrine of a future life, improved by every additional circumstance which could give weight and efficacy to that important truth; 3. the miraculous powers ascribed to the primitive Church; 4. the pure and austere morals of the Christians; and 5. the union and discipline of the Christian republic, which gradually formed an independent and increasing state in the heart of the Roman Empire.

Such are the reasons assigned by Mr. Gibbon for the success of Christianity : the question therefore is, *whether we have sufficient grounds for believing them to be adequate* ; since it is evident, that *to deem them adequate without sufficient grounds* is a mark, not of wisdom, but of credulity.

1. The first reason is *the inflexible and intolerable zeal of the early Christians, derived from the Jewish religion, but purified from its narrow and unsocial spirit.*

On this point, Mr. Gibbon writes with his usual eloquence and elegance ; but after attempting to the utmost of my power, to catch and understand the force of his argument, I cannot find that it condenses itself into any other form than the following :

They, who possess an inflexible and intolerant zeal, must, in the necessary way of cause and effect, sooner or later bring all mankind over to their opinions. But the primitive Christians possessed this inflexible and intolerant zeal. Therefore their religion was soon propagated to a very wide extent.

Of such reasoning I must confess myself unable to discover the conclusiveness. There is no necessary or even natural connection, so far as I can see, between *the zealous obstinacy of one man in maintaining a set of opinions*, and *the conviction of all other men that those opinions are true*. I should think that the very reverse was much more likely to be the case. Dogmatical obstinacy, quite unsupported by evidence, not unfrequently, in the first instance, gives us a considerable degree of perhaps mischievous amusement : if teasing, and importunate, and pertinacious, it will generally, in the second instance, produce a strong feeling of weariness, and impatience, and annoyance. But I much doubt, whether a man was ever induced seriously to exchange one set of opinions for another, by a tiresome and never-ceasing persecutor of this description ; I much doubt, for instance, whether any conceivable zeal, and obstinacy, and importunity, to the perpetual operation of which Mr. Gibbon might haply have been subjected by a determined adherent of the pseudo-prophet Brothers, would have wrought any change in the sentiments of that admirable historian. Yet does he endeavour to persuade himself and his readers, that the inflexible and intolerant zeal of the early Christians is quite reason enough for their wonderful success in making proselytes.

I have considered the point merely as Mr. Gibbon himself has chosen to state it : but, in truth, his statement is most essentially defective. He simply considers pertinacious obstinacy in one man, as an infallible mean of inducing another



man to change his opinion : whereas, he ought to have considered pertinacious obstinacy in one man as an infallible mean of inducing another man to change his opinion, notwithstanding this change of sentiment will expose the convert to torture and death. The *genuine* statement, therefore, of the matter, is as follows : In the judgment of Mr. Gibbon, provided only a man be endowed with a sufficient stock of zeal and obstinacy, he will certainly make numerous proselytes to his opinions, though his proselytes may be morally sure that they will be tortured and murdered for yielding to the wearisome importunity of this obstinate zealot.

This, then, is the first reason assigned by our great historian for the rapid propagation of primitive Christianity.

2. The second is *the doctrine of a future life, improved by every additional circumstance which could give weight and efficacy to that important truth.*

Here again Mr. Gibbon eloquently discusses the uncertainty respecting a future state, which prevailed among the philosophers of Greece and Rome ; the defects inherent in the popular religions ; the prevailing belief of the immortality of the soul among the Jews ; the opinion entertained by many among the Christians, that the end of the world was near at hand ; the doctrine of the millennium ; the conflagration of Rome and the universe ; and the stern declaration of Tertullian, that the unconverted pagans must expect no mercy hereafter. Of these materials his argument is composed ; if such materials can be said to constitute an argument : and his conclusion, for so I presume it is meant to be, is summed up in the following terms : *When the promise of eternal happiness was proposed to mankind, on condition of adopting the faith and observing the precepts of the Gospel, it is no wonder that so advantageous an offer should have been accepted by great numbers of every religion, of every rank, and of every province in the Roman empire.*

I wish not to be captious ; but of this conclusion I can no more see the validity, than I could discern the cogency of his first reason. That men should readily embrace an advantageous offer, when satisfied that the propounders of it could make it good, I can easily conceive and understand : but, why great numbers of every religion, of every rank, and of every province in the Roman empire, should be eager to embrace such an offer, unless they had some reasonable grounds for believing the certainty of its completion, I must own myself quite unable to comprehend. Now, on Mr. Gibbon's principles, what *were* these grounds of assured belief ? By dint of

sheer obstinacy and intolerant zeal, it seems the primitive Christians teased the reluctant Pagans into a full admission of their religious opinions; and, when once this matter was effected (which the historian thinks so easy, that he fearlessly lays it down as his first reason of the success of Christianity,) the world was prepared, without any further evidence, to believe every syllable which their pertinacious instructors might please to teach them, respecting a future state.

Under circumstances so replete with conviction, *it is no wonder*, thinks Mr. Gibbon, that thousands upon thousands of every rank, age, temper, religion, and province, should become eager and satisfied proselytes; *it is no wonder*, that, after having first undergone the process of being harassed by importunity into a complete acquiescence in the opinions of their new teachers, they should next be fully prepared to believe every thing respecting the invisible world which their obstinate preceptors might choose to tell them.

In truth, it *is* no wonder, that those who could be induced, through the operation of mere importunity, to embrace a religion which forthwith exposed them to obloquy and persecution, should, without any further hesitation, though without a shadow of evidence, assent to the naked dogmata of their masters in regard to a future state. The *first* step in the journey is every thing. Let that only be taken, and the remainder of their mental progress is perfectly easy.

3. The third reason assigned by Mr. Gibbon, for the rapid propagation of Christianity, is *the miraculous powers ascribed to the primitive Church*.

Had the historian assigned, as a reason, the miraculous powers *possessed* by the primitive Church; we should readily have perceived the cogency of it: but he speaks only of the miraculous powers *ascribed* to the primitive Church; and, in the course of his discussion, he endeavours to establish the more than probability, that such powers were never *really possessed and exercised*. We have therefore to consider, how far miraculous powers, *ascribed* indeed to the Church, but never *possessed* by it, can be deemed a satisfactory reason for the rapid increase of the votaries of Christianity.

The argument, I apprehend, may be thrown, for the joint sake of brevity and precision, into the following syllogism:

Men are easily and naturally persuaded by the real working of miracles. The power of working miracles was ascribed to the primitive Church, but no miracles were ever performed. Therefore men were easily and naturally persuaded by the non-performance of miracles.

This syllogism, I confess, is a very bad one : but I am unable to frame a better out of the materials with which Mr. Gibbon has furnished me. *The miraculous powers ascribed to the primitive Church, says he, constitute a satisfactory reason for the rapid diffusion of Christianity ; though, all the while, no miraculous powers were ever either possessed or exercised by it.* How can this be? we naturally ask. If miraculous powers were *ascribed* to the Church, without being *really possessed* ; would not such a circumstance produce a directly opposite effect to that propounded by Mr. Gibbon? A claim of working miracles is made by the primitive Church, as a likely mode of gaining proselytes. In effect, however, no miracles are wrought. What follows from this shameful failure of establishing such a claim? Will it gain proselytes, or excite ridicule? Will it enlarge the boundaries of Christianity, or utterly destroy Christianity itself?

It is a whimsical circumstance, that Mr. Gibbon's zeal to throw discredit upon the primitive miracles, produces the necessary and inevitable effect of completely stultifying his third reason.

4. The fourth reason is, *the pure and austere morals of the primitive Christians.*

That the holy lives of the early believers had a natural tendency to recommend their doctrines, we may safely and readily allow : at least we may allow it with certain limitations ; for strictness, and severity, and purity, though they may sometimes gain veneration when they are fortunate enough to escape ridicule and contempt, are far from being always popular virtues. We allow, then, to a certain extent, that the pure and austere morals of the primitive Christians had a natural tendency to recommend their doctrines : but, in this case, according to Mr. Gibbon's own statement, the wonder is, how such exact holiness should happen to be the leading characteristic of a set of shameless impostors. A bad tree does not commonly produce good fruit. What the tree of Paganism bore, is indignantly set forth by a Christian apostle :\* and, though our learned historian celebrates *the elegant mythology of the Greeks* ; those who are acquainted with the classical works of the ancients, well know, that St. Paul's account is perfectly accurate.† How then are we to solve the problem of the eminent piety and strict morality of this knot of im-

\* Rom. i. 18—32.

† It were easy to verify the apostle's statement by express references to the classical writers : but I designedly withhold them.

postors ; who, cheats and liars as they were, shone nevertheless as lights in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation ? Mr. Gibbon himself pretends not to charge them with hypocrisy : their virtues he allows to be real ; their desire of moral perfection to be sincere. A certain degree of ridicule he strives indeed to throw upon them ; but still their sincerity is not controverted by him.\* Could the tree be bad which produced such fruits ? Truly, Christianity, if an imposture, must at least have been a most beneficial imposture ; since purity, and holiness, and meekness, and temperance, and justice, and patience, were, by the acknowledgment even of an enemy, its invariable consequences.

5. The fifth reason assigned by Mr. Gibbon, is *the union and discipline of the Christian republic, which gradually formed an independent and increasing state in the heart of the Roman empire.*

With respect to this reason, we may freely allow to it, as we have already allowed to the fourth, its full weight and influence. Order, and union, and discipline, are capable, no doubt, of producing very considerable effects : and, in truth, without them, no great or permanent results can be expected. Let Mr. Gibbon's fifth reason, therefore, avail, as far as it can avail. The primitive Christians, it seems, were prudent and intelligent men. Though they confidently expected the blessing of heaven upon their labours ; yet they knew that God usually works through the intervention of second causes : nor did they blindly dream of success, without rationally employing such means as lay within their power. Hence they formed

\* "When the Christians of Bithynia," says Mr. Gibbon, "were brought before the tribunal of the younger Pliny, they assured the proconsul, that far from being engaged in any unlawful conspiracy, they were bound, by a solemn obligation, to abstain from the commission of those crimes which disturb the private or public peace of society, from theft, robbery, adultery, perjury, and fraud. Near a century afterwards, Tertullian, with an honest pride, could boast, that very few Christians had suffered by the hand of the executioner, except on account of their religion. Their serious and sequestered life, averse to the gay luxury of the age, inured them to chastity, temperance, economy, and all the sober and domestic virtues. As the greater number were of some trade or profession, it was incumbent on them, by the strictest integrity and the fairest dealing, to remove the suspicions which the profane are too apt to conceive against the appearances of sanctity. The contempt of the world exercised them in the habits of humility, meekness, and patience. The more they were persecuted, the more closely they adhered to each other. Their mutual charity and unsuspecting confidence has been remarked by infidels, and was too often abused by perfidious friends. Hist. of the Decline. chap. xv. vol. ii. p. 318, 319.



themselves into a regularly organized and well disciplined body ; and doubtless, by so judicious an arrangement, their efforts would be facilitated and their object would be promoted. In the way of natural cause and effect, the union of the Christian republic would have a tendency to further its prosperity.

II. We have now gone through the five reasons assigned by Mr. Gibbon, for the success which attended the early propagation of the Gospel : to judge correctly of their sufficiency, we must consider the aspect under which Christianity would first present itself to the heathen world.

By the Pagans, the Jews were alike hated and despised. " Their vile institutes," says Tacitus, " became prevalent only through an excess of depravity. Every worthless character, despising the religion of his forefathers, contributed his share to the common stock. Hence the Jewish republic gradually increased : and their obstinate fidelity to each other, united with domestic good offices to themselves, and hostile hatred toward all the rest of mankind, had a similar tendency to advance their prosperity. Separated in their banquets, severed in their beds, this race, though most detestably prone to lust, carefully abstain from all commerce with foreign women. Among themselves, however, no abomination is counted unlawful. The first lessons which they learn, are, to condemn the gods, to renounce their native country, to hold equally cheap both parents, and children, and brothers. Yet they anxiously study the increase of their numbers ; and, on that account, deem it impious to put any one of their offspring to death. In short, their lawgiver Moses, that he might the more effectually bind the nation to himself, gave them rites wholly new, and altogether contrary to the rest of mankind. So that what we deem sacred, they reckon profane ; and again, what we count abominable, are freely allowed among them."\*

In the same disgraceful light that the Jews were contemplated abroad, the punishment of crucifixion was viewed by the Romans at home. Horrible as it was, it was no less disgraceful than horrible. None, save the vilest slaves and malefactors, were subjected to it : the penalty never attached to a free Roman citizen, whatever might have been his crimes : it was reserved solely for those who were esteemed the basest of mankind. Our own law has established a difference between the block and the gallows : death by the one is a punishment without ignominy ; death by the other is a punishment which

\* Tacit. Hist. lib. v. § 5, 4.

brings disgrace both upon the culprit and upon his family. But, though this difference is felt and understood among ourselves, it presents only a very faint idea of the extremity of shame, which attended an execution by the cross. To *us*, associated as it is with the mysteries of our religion, industriously borne as an ensign by the noble and the brave, and never mentioned but with a certain holy feeling of sacred awe: to *us*, with all our earliest notions thrown into a totally different train from those of the ancient Romans, the mention of *the cross* conveys no vivid sense of ignominy: rather indeed it exhibits to the imagination every thing great, and sublime, and compassionate, and benignant, and venerable. To form a just idea of it, we must carefully divest ourselves of modern impressions, and take our station in the times of antiquity. Thither transported, we must familiarize ourselves with the thought, that one who has expiated his crimes against society by suspension from the gibbet, might be deemed a highly respectable character, when contrasted with the vile, and base, and abandoned wretch who had disgracefully suffered the ignominy of crucifixion.\*

Now the founder of the Christian religion united in his own single person the two characteristics, which, among the ancients, were deemed specially shameful. He was at once a Jew, and a condemned person who had undergone the penalty of the crucifixion. His Jewish origin alone were sufficient disgrace in the eyes of the Greeks and Romans: but, as if this were not base enough, he was farther presented to them under the aspect of a crucified malefactor.

Of the same degraded race with their servilely-punished master, was the whole college of the apostles, and the greater part of the earliest missionaries of the Gospel. With the exception of Paul, who to his Hebrew character accidentally superadded that of a municipal Roman citizen, all the apostles, and with them most of the primitive teachers, were equally subject to the punishment of crucifixion: and, in the issue, many of them were actually thus put to death.†

Nor was even this the whole depth of abjectness in which Christ and his followers were placed by the circumstances of their birth. They were not only of the despised stock of Is-

\* See on this subject Bp. Pearson on the Creed. Art. iv. note n. vol. ii. p. 260, 261. Edit. Oxon. 1797. From the circumstance of crucifixion being peculiarly the punishment of slaves, it was familiarly termed by the Romans *servile supplicium*.

† Thus Tacitus speaks of them, in the time of Nero, as being *cru-cibus affixi*. Annal. lib. xv. § 44.

rael, but they were likewise among the lowest of that despised stock. Instead of occupying a comparatively honourable station in the higher ranks of the Jewish republic, Christ himself bore the character of being the son of a labouring carpenter in a country-town, and his apostles were either fishermen, or publicans, or mechanics.

Such were the instruments by whom Christianity was first excogitated, and through whom it was afterwards successfully offered to the Pagans.

Under what aspect, then, must the Gospel have appeared, when it was originally presented to the Gentile world? A number of obscure low-born men, sprung from the despised nation of the Jews, suddenly issue forth from what Tacitus deemed the sink of every thing disgraceful, and address the lofty Romans and the lettered Greeks. They call upon them to renounce the deities, under whom Greece had flourished and Rome had attained the sovereignty of the universe: deities, whose venerable worship had prevailed from the remotest antiquity; deities, whose solemn rites were incorporated with the very essence of the ancient politics; deities, whom philosophers thought it wise, and just, and decorous to honour; deities, whom statesmen and priests were alike interested to uphold. They charge them to reject, as impious and abominable, a religion which combined itself with all their early habits and associations; a religion, which freely permitted the indulgence of all their sensual inclinations; a religion, which had been professed by heroes and philosophers, by kings and by statesmen; a religion, which formed the basis of the noblest strains of poetry; a religion (when its darker shades were happily concealed) of joy and pleasure, of festivity, and elegance, and cheerfulness. These deities and this religion they peremptorily command them to forsake; and, in the place of them, they sternly enjoin the acceptance of an upstart theological system which had been first struck out by a crucified Jew; which was now preached by a combination of Jews of the very lowest rank; which had not received the sanction of the ruling powers, even among the Jews themselves; which contradicted all the previous notions entertained by the Gentiles; which called them to a life of holiness, and abstinence, and mortification, and self-denial; which thwarted their inclinations, and crossed their purposes, and injured their interests, and disturbed their comforts; which set their philosophy at naught, and derided the most venerable of their institutions; which appeared to be little short of treason to the state; and which speedily brought on the contempt, and hatred, and per-



secution, and torture, and death of those, who, in an evil hour to themselves, had been led to embrace it. As an inducement to adopt the new system, they assure their Gentile hearers, that if they become converts to it, they must look for nothing but trouble in this present world: yet they venture to declare, that, provided only they will renounce in its favour the ancient religion of their forefathers, they may certainly promise themselves eternal happiness after death in a world to come. With respect to the crucified Jew, whom they acknowledge as their master, and whom they mention as the original author of their scheme, they assert, that in some incomprehensible manner, salvation hereafter must be expected only through his meritorious death upon the cross; and that the circumstances of his ignominious execution is not so much a matter of shame and disgrace, as a matter of exultation and triumph. They confess, that Christ crucified was to the unconverted Jews a stumbling-block, and might well appear to the inquisitive Greeks no better than so much rank foolishness: yet they declare that he is the power of God and the wisdom of God. They maintain, that although he died upon the cross, he rose bodily from the grave on the third day, and afterwards ascended triumphant to heaven. They acknowledge him to have been a man, despised and rejected of men, apparent in the form of a servant, poor, and humble, and mocked, and slighted, and trampled upon; but, at the same time, they assert, that he was born from a virgin without the co-operation of a mortal father; that he was the Word of God, with God in the beginning, and himself God; that by him (to wit, by this crucified Jew) all things were made, and without him was not any thing made that was made; that he was the brightness of God's glory and the express image of his person; that by him God made the worlds, and appointed him heir of all things; that, when he had himself purged our sins, he sat down on the right hand of the majesty on high; that for the suffering of death, he was crowned with glory and honour; that in him we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins; that he (namely, the crucified Jew) is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of every creature; that by him were all things created, that are in heaven and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers; that all things were created by him and for him; that he is before all things, and by him all things consist; that he (still the crucified Jew) hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; and that he (the Jew who suffered death upon the cross) is Alpha and Omega, the



beginning and the ending, that liveth and was dead, the first and the last, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty.

This is the aspect under which the Gospel must have appeared, when it was first preached to the Gentiles, to the lordly Romans, and to the philosophic Greeks. What then must they have thought of it: and where was the human probability that they would embrace it? Can we much wonder, that when such an apparently strange medley was presented to them, and by such hands too as those of the apostles, they should turn from it and them with ineffable contempt? Can we wonder, that by the Greeks the whole scheme should be viewed as rank foolishness? Can we wonder that the Athenians should mock, or that a sober Roman governor should deem an apostle stark mad? Can we wonder that a grave historian should describe the system, as a destructive superstition; which, springing up in the despised land of Judea, spread at length to Rome, whither all atrocious and shameful things, sooner or later, from every quarter of the globe, flow together and are celebrated? \* Truly we can wonder at none of these things: the real wonder is, how the contemned Gospel (though Mr. Gibbon has contrived to persuade himself that *it is no wonder at all*) *should have been accepted by great numbers of every religion, of every rank, and of every province in the Roman empire.* The fact itself is indisputable: the difficulty is, on any ordinary principles, to account for it.

Have we then sufficient grounds for believing, that Mr. Gibbon's five reasons are adequate to solve the problem of the astonishingly rapid propagation of Christianity?

Of these reasons, we have seen, that the two first, namely, *the inflexible pertinacity of the early Christians*, and *the circumstance of their teaching the doctrine of a future retributory state*, do not in the slightest degree account for their remarkable success; and that the third, namely, *the ascription of miraculous powers to the Church*, would inevitably, unless those powers were *really possessed*, be rather an impediment, than a furtherance to the project of converting mankind to the Gospel. The whole stress, therefore, lies upon the two remaining reasons, namely, *the holy lives of the primitive Christians*, and *the excellent discipline of the Christian Church*. Hence we have only to inquire, whether these two reasons are sufficient to account for the extraordinary phenomenon before us.

\* Tacit. Annal. lib. xv. § 44.

Mr. Gibbon thinks it no *wonder*, that, in an incredibly short space of time, Christianity, introduced, and recommended, and circumstanced in the mode which I have recently set forth, should have been cordially received as a divine revelation from one end of the world to the other; merely because the primitive Christians were men of pure and austere morals, and because the primitive Church was in an excellent state of discipline and union.

Others may not unreasonably doubt, whether such a cause be alone adequate to produce such an effect; whether morality and discipline be sufficient to have brought about the general reception of Christianity, circumstanced as Christianity was at its first promulgation. They may suspect, that something more was necessary: they may hesitate, before they admit Mr. Gibbon's solution of the difficulty.

Each party, the admirers and the opponents of Mr. Gibbon, will be apt to charge one another with credulity: the former, because it is believed that something more cogent than the five, or rather than the two reasons, is apparently requisite; the latter, because it is believed that the whole matter is satisfactorily accounted for by the morality of the early Christians and the good discipline of their Church.

Which party be the most credulous in its estimate of cause and effect, must be left to the decision of the sober, and candid, and unbiassed inquirer.

III. Those persons who deem Mr. Gibbon's five reasons insufficient, are wont, for the true solution of the difficulty, to resort to the scriptural history itself. There they find it constantly asserted, that the success of the early preachers of the Gospel was owing to two causes: the powerful operation of God's Spirit upon the hearts of those who were addressed; and the evidence afforded to their understandings, by the frequent performance of miracles.

1. The first of these two causes was necessary, on account of the natural reluctance of man to embrace a life of danger and self-denial in the place of a life of safety and indulgence. Though the intellect may be convinced, the cordial assent of the will and the affections does by no means follow as a necessary consequence. We all know that the head and the heart may often be completely at variance. To overcome, therefore, the unwillingness of some, the timidity of others, and the lingering hesitation of all, it was needful that the mighty power of God should accompany the words of the apostles. Without this, few or none would have joined them, when they found what a sacrifice was required at their hands. Inveterate pre-

judices were to be overcome ; long-formed evil habits were to be subdued ; fears were to be conquered ; courage was to be instilled ; an ardent love to an unseen Redeemer was to be implanted ; devotion to a cause, universally derided and persecuted, was to be produced ; the whole temper, and spirit, and disposition, in short, of the proselyte were to be thoroughly changed, in order to his becoming a Christian. This, we are assured in Scripture, could not be effected, save by the special operation of God's Holy Spirit attending upon the early preachers of the Gospel.

To such an assurance, when we consider the immense difficulties with which the first introduction of Christianity was surrounded, our unbiassed reason voluntarily assents. With aid thus potent, it is easy to conceive how the new religion triumphed over every impediment : without it, we are puzzled and perplexed to assign any satisfactory cause why thousands and myriads of the Gentiles should eagerly flock to the despised and dangerous standard of the cross.

On this point, the language both of the narrative and of the missionaries themselves is perfectly clear and decisive.

"The Lord," we are told, "added to the Church daily such as should be saved.\* With great power," it is said, "gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus : and great grace was upon them.† The hand of the Lord," we read, "was with the *scattered missionaries* : and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord.‡ As many," it is said, "as were disposed to eternal life believed.§ A certain woman named Lydia," remarks the author of the narrative, "which worshipped God, heard us : whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul.|| My speech and my preaching," says the great apostle of the Gentiles to his Corinthian converts, "was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power : that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.¶ For, after that, in the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom knew not God ; it pleased God, by the foolishness of preaching, to save them that believe.\*\* Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man ? I have planted, Apollos watered ; but God gave the increase. So that neither is he that planteth, any thing ; neither he that watereth ; but God that giveth the increase.†† Of his own will," says James

\* Acts ii. 47.

† Acts iv. 33.

‡ Acts xi. 21.

§ Acts xiii. 48. Gr.

|| Acts xvi. 14.

¶ 1 Corin. ii. 4, 5.

\*\* 1 Corin. i. 21.

†† 1 Corin. iii. 5—7.



respecting God, "begat he us with a word of truth, that we should be a kind of first-fruit of his creatures.\* Blessed," says Peter, "be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ; which according to his abundant mercy, hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.† Ye have an unction from the Holy One," says John, "and ye know all things."‡

Such is the constant avowal of men, who sealed their faith with their blood. We doubtless have only their own assertion; and our opinion must rest upon the credits which we give to it; but, as the fact alleged fully accounts for their success, as they cheerfully laid down their lives in proof of their veracity, and as it is no easy matter to solve the problem of the rapid spread of Christianity, if all divine agency be excluded; we may perhaps find it more difficult, on the whole, to disbelieve them, than to believe them.

2. The second cause, alleged in the scriptural history, for the unexampled success of the early preachers of the Gospel, is the power which they possessed of working miracles.

"By the hands of the apostles," we read, "were many signs and wonders wrought among the people. And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women; insomuch that they brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, that at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them."||

As the spirit of God was necessary to change the heart and to influence the will, in order that Christianity might be received even in the face of every discouragement: so was the power of working miracles necessary to convince the understanding, that a religion thus characterized could not but be from heaven. The apostles claimed to be ambassadors. But an ambassador cannot be received without producing his credentials: his mere word and asseveration are insufficient.—The credentials therefore of the apostles, credentials, to which on all occasions they fearlessly appealed, were miracles. "I will not dare," says Paul, "to speak of any of those things which Christ hath not wrought by me, to make the Gentiles obedient, by word and deed, through mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God; so that, from Jerusalem and round about unto Illyricum, I have fully preached the Gospel of Christ.¶ Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought

\* James i. 18.

† 1. Peter i. 3.

‡ 1 John ii. 20.

|| Acts v. 12, 14, 15.

¶ Rom. xv. 18, 19.



among you in all patience, in signs and wonders, and mighty deeds.\* These signs, declares Christ himself to his disciples, shall follow them that believe: In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and, if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.† But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me, both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth.‡

Such is the claim made by the apostles to the power of working miracles: and a similar claim had already been made by Christ, previous to his crucifixion. Now, that the performance of miracles affords an ample proof of a divine commission, few will be disposed to deny; and that when conjoined with the special influence of God's Spirit upon the human heart, it is an abundantly sufficient cause of the rapid acceptance of the Gospel, most will be inclined to allow. But here a question arises, whether the claim was real, or only simulated: whether, in the language of Mr. Gibbon, miraculous powers were only *ascribed* to the primitive Church, or whether they were really *possessed* by it.

The reasoning of Mr. Hume, in regard to miracles, brings out as a result, that no human evidence can in any case render them credible. For a miracle is a violation of the laws of nature: and a firm and unalterable experience has established those laws. Therefore it will always be more probable, that the testimony in favour of a miracle should be false, than that unalterable experience should be violated. Hence he lays it down as a plain consequence, *that no testimony is sufficient to establish a miracle, unless the testimony be of such a kind, that its falsehood would be more miraculous than the fact which it endeavours to establish.*

To an unsophisticated intellect, this reasoning will, I think, appear not a little paradoxical: and to an intellect accustomed to discussion, it will seem not a little fallacious.

It is hard to conceive why competent evidence should not be sufficient to establish any fact, which does not involve a contradiction in terms. No doubt, the more extraordinary the fact, the stronger is the evidence which we require: but to assert in the abstract that *no testimony can establish a miracle*, more nearly resembles a paradox thrown out for the purpose

\* 2 Corin.. xii. 12.

† Mark xvi. 17, 18.

‡ Acts i. 8.

of exciting astonishment, than a sober and cautious position laid down from a real love of truth. At least, so I should think that to a plain honest man it would be very apt to appear.

The assertion, however, is not only paradoxical ; it is also conveyed through the medium of a train of reasoning which itself is palpably fallacious. Mr. Hume lays it down as incontrovertible, that a *firm and unalterable experience has established those laws of nature, which it is the very essence of a miracle to violate*. Now what is this but begging the very point in litigation ? That the firm and unalterable experience of Mr. Hume himself and of those various persons with whom he may have conversed, is in favour of the inviolability of the laws of nature, I can readily allow : but how does this prove the same position in regard to the experience of all ages ? Mr. Hume can only testify as to the experience of himself and his friends. What the experience of other persons may have been, he can only learn from credible testimony. It may have agreed with his own experience, or it may have contradicted it. But, of whatever description it may be, Mr. Hume can plainly know nothing about the matter, save from historical evidence. To call therefore his own experience a *firm and unalterable experience*, meaning by the expression *the firm and unalterable experience of all ages*, is most undoubtedly to beg the very point in debate : for, while Mr. Hume asserts, that *the absolute uniformity of the laws of nature is the firm and unalterable experience of all ages* ; this *absolute uniformity of the laws of nature* is the precise matter, which they who believe in the occurrence of miracles, deny. Here then we have assertion marshalled against assertion ; and which of the two is to be received as valid, can only, so far as I perceive, be determined by adequate testimony. Under such circumstances, how do the contending parties proceed ? Those who believe in the occasional violation of the laws of nature by the instrumentality of miracles, produce in vindication of their belief, what they deem sufficient historical evidence : but Mr. Hume begs the question, by denying that any testimony can be sufficient to establish the fact of a miracle, simply and merely because a miracle contradicts, not *universal experience*, (for this is the litigated point,) but the *experience of himself, and the several persons with whom he has conversed*. His reasoning being thus fallacious, his conclusion must of necessity, be the same ; even if we omit the evident absurdity of the terms in which it is couched. *No testimony is sufficient to establish a miracle, unless the testimony be of such a kind, that its false-*

*hood would be more miraculous than the fact which it endeavours to establish.* Such is Mr. Hume's conclusion from his previous reasoning, the terms of which I have ventured to stigmatize with evident absurdity. For what possible idea can any man frame to himself of *the miraculousness of a falsehood*, in any legitimate sense of the word *miraculous*? A miraculous feeding of the hungry, or a miraculous healing of disorders, or a miraculous resuscitation of the dead, we can conceive and understand: but a miraculous falsehood, in the same sense of the word *miraculous* (which the homogeneity of the argument plainly requires,) is a perfect incomprehensibility; we can absolutely form no notion whatever of such a thing. Had Mr. Hume said, *that no testimony is sufficient to establish a miracle, unless the testimony be of so strong a description, that the occurrence of the miracle is a more probable event than the falsehood of the witnesses*; he would have spoken at once intelligibly and rationally: but, in that case, he would have virtually allowed, that *a miracle might be established by adequate testimony*. This concession, however, did not suit his purpose: and therefore after first begging the question, he next surprises us in his conclusion with the extraordinary phenomenon of *a miraculous falsehood*.

From what has been said, the result is simply as follows: Christianity claims the sanction of miraculous powers. Its claim must be examined like any other historical fact. If the evidence in favour of the claim preponderate, it must be admitted: if the evidence be clearly insufficient, it must be rejected.

Now, the evidence requisite to satisfy a rational inquirer, is of a two-fold description: it must be shewn, that certain actions purporting to be miracles, were certainly performed; and it must be shewn, that those actions were real, not simulated miracles.

(1.) With respect to the performance of various actions, purporting to be miracles, and believed to be such, both at and after the time of their performance, the following is the testimony which may be offered:

The belief of some supernatural interposition is, in the abstract, necessary to account for the fact of the wonderfully rapid propagation of Christianity. We have seen how ineffectually Mr. Gibbon labours to solve the difficulty by natural causes: and, if such a man failed in the attempt, it is not very probable that inferior talents will be more successful. An incontrovertible fact presents itself to us. That fact cannot be accounted for on natural principles. Therefore the neces-



sity of the case requires, that supernatural principles of some sort or other should be called in. History cannot proceed without them. We have a knot which no one but a Deity can untie.

Accordingly, both the Founder of Christianity, and the first preachers of it to the world at large, claim the power of working miracles; as being that special supernatural interposition, which was to accredit them to mankind in the character of messengers indeed sent from God. That the claim was made, is indisputable: and I contend, that in the very nature of things, either the claim would not have been made, if the power had not been possessed; or, if it had been made unsuccessfully, the whole scheme of thus recommending the Gospel must have proved abortive. For would any man of common sense risk the failure of his entire plan, by claiming a power, which all the while he knew that he did not possess: or, if he were induced to act a part of such consummate folly, would not his want of success in performing a miracle, involve of necessity the ruin of his project? Supernatural powers are voluntarily made the test of a divine commission. On trial, no such powers are found to be possessed. What is the inevitable result? The pretenders are laughed off the stage, as impudent mountebanks: and their scheme, agreeably to the test proposed by themselves, is universally rejected. Of this necessary consequence of an unaccomplished claim of miraculous powers, the impostor Mohammed was so well aware, that he wisely refrained from advancing it. Miracles were indeed required of him, under the natural impression that they would be the credentials of every promulger of a new revelation: but the demand was always evaded, and the power disclaimed.\*

\* They say: We will by no means believe on thee, until thou cause a spring of water to gush forth for us out of the earth; or thou have a garden of palm-trees and vines, and thou cause rivers to spring forth from the midst thereof in abundance; or thou cause the heavens to fall down upon us, as thou hast given out, in pieces; or thou bring down God and the angels to vouch for thee; or thou have a house of gold; or thou ascend by a ladder to heaven: neither will we believe thy ascending thither alone, until thou cause a book to descend unto us, bearing witness of thee, which we may read. Answer: My Lord be praised! Am I other than a man, sent as an apostle? And nothing hindereth men from believing, when a direction is come unto them, except that they say: Hath God sent a man for his apostle? Say: God is a sufficient witness between me and you; for he knoweth and regardeth his servants. Koran. chap. xvii. They have sworn by God, by the most solemn oath, that if a sign come unto them, they would certainly believe therein. Say: Verily signs are in the power of God alone; and he permitteth you not to understand, that, when they come, they will not believe. Koran. chap. vi.



Had Christ and his disciples then been impostors, it is reasonable to conclude, that they would never have claimed a power which they knew themselves not to possess.

The persons before whom their alleged miracles were wrought, afford another argument for the real performance of something which at least appeared to be out of the common course of nature. Pretended miracles may, without much difficulty, be palmed upon mankind for real miracles, when they, in whose presence they are wrought, favour the actors, and are predisposed to believe the genuineness of the portents. Thus neither the Pagans nor the Papists have wanted devout believers in their spurious wonders: but as the wonders themselves will not stand the test of a severe examination, so the believers in them have always *previously* symbolized with the performers of them.\* The very reverse of this was the case with Christ and his apostles. Whatever deeds they performed, they performed them before enemies, not before friends; before persons prejudiced against them, not before persons pre-possessed in their favour. Would any reasonable being make such an attempt, when, if an impostor, he could scarcely escape detection? Would any reasonable being appeal to those who had been his enemies for the truth of the

\* Respecting the pretended miracles wrought at the tomb of the Abbe Paris, see Bp. Douglas's Criterion. His lordship has the following just observations on the point before us: "The religion, in confirmation of which the miracles of Jesus were appealed to, was subversive of that believed by those to whom they were proposed. That pretensions to miracles, whose end was to confirm opinions and doctrines already established, should be admitted without due examination by the favourers of such opinions, is not at all to be wondered at: and this greatly invalidates the most boasted wonders of Popery. But the miracles of Jesus, whose end was not to countenance, but to overturn the established doctrines, could not possibly meet with an easy reception: assent to them would be difficult to be obtained; and never could be obtained without serious examination, and the strongest conviction. Other pretensions to miracles did not gain credit, but after the establishment of those opinions which they were thought to confirm, and among persons previously biassed in favour of those opinions. But every thing is the reverse with regard to the miracles of Jesus; for they were previous to the belief of Christianity, and gave cause to the belief of it: every witness of them was a convert, and every believer had been an enemy." Criter. p. 292, 293. These remarks may equally apply to the pretended miracles, which have been recently set up by modern Papists; particularly that in Ireland, where a young woman is said to have been instantaneously cured of dumbness. Her tongue had been examined by medical practitioners, and there was found to be no defect whatsoever; a tolerably strong proof, that her previous silence was voluntary: for she had not been dumb from her infancy.

miracles wrought by him, if no miracles whatsoever had been performed, or at least if nothing had been performed which was believed to be miraculous? Yet did Christ fearlessly appeal to the Jews themselves, as to the reality of his preternatural works: and Paul, in writing to the Gentile churches of Rome, and Corinth, and Galatia, reminds them, in letters still extant, of the miracles which had effected the conversion of many of their members, though once bigoted and prejudiced heathens.\* That such appeals should be confidently made on the one hand, and freely admitted on the other, when all the while both parties knew full well that no miracles had ever been wrought: a circumstance like this, beggars the utmost profuseness of credibility.

As these appeals were fearlessly made, so not a single instance can be produced, either of the denial or the detection of any one of the miracles recorded in the New Testament. Some of the persons that wrote the histories, had conversed with Christ; and others of them were the immediate disciples of the apostles. Hence the histories were composed and published so short a time after the alleged occurrences, that numerous individuals must have been alive, who could easily have contradicted them if they were mere fabrications: and, when we consider the bitter hostility of the Jews, we cannot doubt that their interested diligence would readily have adduced witnesses to silence, and put to merited shame such scandalous attempts to impose upon the world. Thus Matthew records, that at two several times, near the sea of Tiberias, Christ miraculously fed five thousand men and four thousand men, beside women and children, with only a few loaves and five small fishes: † and thus John gives a very circumstantial account of the resuscitation of Lazarus, after he had been dead and buried four days; stating that it took place at Bethany, which was only two miles from Jerusalem, and that many of the Jews were eye-witnesses of the fact.‡ Now, if these matters had never occurred, what could have been more easy than their confutation? Numerous witnesses might have been brought from the neighbourhood of the lake of Tiberias, who would readily have declared, that the alleged facts of twice miraculously feeding large multitudes, were wholly unknown to them: and the whole town of Bethany would have attested that the marvellous tale of the resurrection of Lazarus was, from beginning to end, a barefaced fabrication. Yet we hear

\* John x. 24, 25, 37, 39. Rom. xv. 18, 19. 2 Corinth. xii. 12. Gal. iii. 5.

† Matt. xiv. 13—22. xv. 29—39.

‡ John xi.

not that these facts were ever controverted, though the Jewish rulers were from the very first decidedly hostile to the cause of Christianity, and though the falsification of the miracles would above all other things have promoted their object. Hence the obvious presumption is, that such facts were too notorious to be safely contradicted.

Now were Christ and his apostles the only persons who confidently appealed to the evidence of miracles, in the very face of their enemies; thus daring them, as it were, to a detection of imposture, if any imposture had existed. There was a class of writers in the primitive Church, who composed what were styled *Apologies*. These were addressed to the Pagans: and it was their avowed design to defend Christianity, and to vindicate the reception of it. The oldest writer of this description, with whose works we are at all acquainted, is Quadratus. He lived about seventy years after the death of Christ, and presented his *Apology* to the Emperor Adrian. A passage of it has been preserved by Eusebius; from which it appears that he formally and confidently appealed to the miracles of Christ, as a matter which admitted not of the least doubt or controversy. "The works of our Saviour," says he, "were always conspicuous, for they were real. Both they that were healed, and they that were raised from the dead, were seen, not only when they were healed or raised, but for a long time afterwards; not only whilst he dwelt on this earth, but also after his departure, and for a good while subsequent to it: inso-much that some of them have reached to our times."\* To the same purpose speaks Justin Martyr, who followed Quadratus at the distance of about thirty years. "Christ healed those who from their birth were blind, and deaf, and lame; causing, by his word, one to leap, another to hear, and a third to see: and, having raised the dead, and caused them to live, he, by his works, excited attention, and induced the men of that age to know him. Who, however, seeing these things done, said that it was a magical appearance; and dared to call him a magician and a deceiver of the people."† Next in chronological order, follows Tertullian, who flourished during the same century with Justin Martyr. "That person whom the Jews had vainly imagined, from the meanness of his appearance, to be a mere man, they afterwards, in consequence of the power which he exerted, considered as a magician: when he, with one word, ejected devils out of the bodies of

\* Quadrat. Apol. apud Euseb. Eccles. Hist. lib. iv. c. 3. cited by Paley.

† Just. Mart. Dial. p. 258. edit. Thirlby. cited by Paley.



men, gave sight to the blind, cleansed the leprous, strengthened the nerves of those that had the palsy, and lastly, with one command, raised the dead; when he, I say, made the very elements obey him, assuaged the storms, and walked upon the seas, demonstrating himself to be the Word of God.”\* We may finally notice Origen, who lived in the third century, and who published a regular defence of Christianity against the philosopher Celsus. “Undoubtedly we do think him to be the Christ and the Son of God, because he healed the lame and the blind: and we are the more confirmed in this persuasion by what is written in the prophecies: Then shall the eyes of the blind be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall hear, and the lame man shall leap as an hart. But that he also raised the dead, and that it is not a fiction of those who wrote the Gospels, is evident from hence: that, if it had been a fiction, there would have been many recorded to be raised up, and such as had been a long time in their graves. But, it not being a fiction, few have been recorded.† That the defenders of Christianity should thus needlessly commit themselves to the hostile Pagans, if no miracles had been performed, and when a regular confutation of their pretences was perfectly easy, it is alike difficult to account for and hard to believe.

In truth, however, neither the Jews nor the Pagans ever thought of denying the fact, inimical as they were to Christianity, and desirous as they ever shewed themselves of stopping its progress. The *fact* they fully admitted; though, had it been a falsehood, they might easily have demonstrated that it *was* such: the *fact* they admitted; but they endeavoured to account for it in a manner which might not compel them to acknowledge the justice of the conclusion drawn from it by the Christians. In the days of our Lord, the favourite solution of the Jews was diabolical agency:‡ in the days of Justin Martyr and Tertullian, they were inclined to call in magic to help them out of the difficulty:§ and, at a later period, they devised the notable tale, as if dissatisfied with their former explanations, that Jesus stole out of the temple the ineffable name of Jehovah, and by its instrumentality performed all his various wonders.¶ Among the Pagans, magic was resorted to as the best mode of explaining the miracles of Christ: and

\* Tertull. Apol. p. 20. ed. Prior. Par. 1675. cited by Paley.

† Orig. cont. Cels. lib. ii. § 48. cited by Paley.

‡ Matt. xii. 22—24.

§ See the above citations from those fathers.

¶ See their Talmudical book, called *Avoda Zara*, published by Edward at Hamburgh in 4to. 1705. cited by Bp. Douglas.



to this hypothesis they seem to have very steadily adhered. Thus Hierocles,\* Celsus,† Julian,‡ Porphyry, and Eunomius, adopting the established theory of the day,|| acknowledge, that miracles were really performed by our Lord; but, with an affectation of undervaluing them, resolve all such phenomena into sorcery. It was this circumstance which led many of the fathers, in their vindications of Christianity (as they themselves tell us,) to prefer the argument from prophecy, to the argument from even acknowledged miracles. "I adopt such a mode of reasoning," says Justin, "lest any of our opponents should say: What hinders, but that he, whom we call Christ, being a man sprung from men, performed by magical art the mira-

\* 'Ημεις μὲν τον τοιαυτα πεποιηκοτο (meaning Apollonius of Tyana) ου θεον, αλλα θεοις κεχαρισμενον ανδρα ηγουμεθα. Hieroc. apud Euseb. In this quotation, Hierocles compares the miracles of Apollonius with those of Jesus, the truth of which he evidently admits; and only blames the Christians for worshipping Jesus as a God. Bp. Douglas.

† Ανεπλασε δε τι ετερον συγκατατιθεμενος μὲν, πως ταις παραδοξοις δυναμεσιν ὡς Ἰησους εποησεν, εν αἷς τες πολλους επεισεν ακολουθειν αυτω ὡς Χριστω διαβαλλειν δι' αυτας βουλομενος, ὡς απο μαγειας και ου θεια δυναμει γεγεννημενας, ωησι, γαρ, αυτον σκοτιον τραφεντα μισθαρηνησαντα εις Αιγυπτον, δυναμεων τινων πειραθεντα, εκειθεν επανελθειν, Θεον δι' εκεινας τας δυναμεις εαυτον αναγορευοντα. Orig. cont. Cels. lib. i. p. 30. edit. Speds. The meaning of this quotation is, that Celsus, though he owned that Jesus performed miracles, ascribed them to magic; affirming, that Jesus having been educated in Egypt, had there learned their art of doing wonders. Bp. Douglas.

‡ 'Ο δε Ἰησους ολιγους προς τοις τριακοσίοις ενιαυτοις ονομαζεται, εργασαμενος παρ' ὃν εζη χρονον εργον ουδεν ακοης αξιον, ει μη τις οισται τους κνλλους και τυφλους ιασασθαι και δαιμονουντας εφορκιζειν, εν Βηθσαϊδα και εν βηθανια ταις κωμαις, των μεγιστων εργων ειναι. Julian. apud Cyril. lib. vi. Though Julian here affects to depreciate and undervalue the miracles of Jesus, yet he admits their truth. Bp. Douglas.

|| Unless, says Jerome, speaking to Vigilantius respecting the miracles of Christ, you pretend, according to the manner of the Gentiles and the profane, of Porphyry and Eunomius, that these are the tricks of demons. Hieron. cont. Vigil. cited by Paley. From this passage it is clear, that the Pagans never once thought of denying the reality of the miracles of our Lord: they lived too near the time of their performance, and found the evidence too strong, ever to think (like modern infidels) of denying their reality. That the miracles were truly performed, it was acknowledged: that they were wrought by the finger of God, was denied. To us of the present day, who are somewhat incredulous on the score of magic, the universal acknowledgment of the fact is quite sufficient.

cles which we attributed to him?"\* Ireneus, who flourished about forty years after Justin, notices the same evasion in the adversaries of Christianity, and replies to it by the same argument. "But, if they shall say that the Lord performed these things by an illusory appearance, leading these objectors to the prophecies, we will shew from them, that all things were thus predicted concerning him, and that they strictly came to pass."† The same sentiment, upon the same occasion, is delivered by Lactantius, who lived about a century later. "He performed miracles. We might have supposed him to have been a magician, as ye say, and as the Jews then supposed, if all the prophets had not with one spirit foretold that Christ should perform these very things."‡

Such is the evidence in favour of miracles: and we may observe respecting it, that step by step it increases in strength, until finally the bitterest enemies of Christianity, the unconverted Jews and Pagans, and that too in regular succession from the very earliest times, openly and unreservedly acknowledge, that these wonders were really performed. They at once indeed shew their hatred, and excuse their resistance to the Gospel, by ascribing the performance of the miracles either to magic, or to diabolical agency, or to an unhallowed use of the sacred name *Jehovah*: but the fact itself they universally allow; and this is amply sufficient for our present argument. Jesus and his apostles claimed to work miracles, specially as a test of their divine commission. The Jews and the Pagans alike confess that miracles *were* wrought. Is it credible that they would have done this, unless compelled by the force of irresistible testimony; when an exposure of the fraud, if any fraud existed, would instantaneously have annihilated every pretence to a divine commission? The falsehood of these various concurring witnesses, both friends and enemies, Jews and Gentiles, I would not, in the phraseology of Mr. Hume, assert to be a greater miracle than the attested miracles themselves; because I can form no distinct idea of a miraculous falsehood: but this I will venture to say, that the testimony in favour of Christian miracles is so strong and so varied, that it is a less exertion of faith to admit the occurrence of the miracles than to maintain the falsehood of the witnesses.

(2.) Deeming the evidence before us quite sufficient, to prove that certain extraordinary actions, purporting to be mi-

\* Justin. Apol. i. p. 48. cited by Paley.

† Iren. lib. ii. c. 57. cited by Paley.

‡ Lactant. Instit. lib. v. c. 3. cited by Paley.

racles, were wrought by Christ and his apostles, I have now only to shew that these actions were real, and not simulated miracles.

An infidel, compelled by the force of testimony, like the Jews and Pagans of old, might be disposed to concede, that some remarkable deeds were performed by the author and the early preachers of Christianity : but, at the same time, as it may be doubted whether he would resort to magic for a solution, he might deny that these remarkable deeds were effected by any interposition of heaven. The whole matter he might be inclined to resolve into a mere trick or juggler ; often, as in the case of pretended exorcisms of demons and cures of sick persons, adroitly and successfully accomplished through the intervention and by the aid of confederates. One man, who is in the secret, pretends to be possessed by a devil ; another man, who is also in the secret, affects to labour under some dreadful disorder. When the mechanism of the cheat has been thus duly got up, the word of healing is spoken, and the patient (marvellous to relate) is suddenly restored to perfect health.

Such is the objection which is now to be considered : and I will begin with fairly confessing, that had no miracles been wrought save of the above description, it would at least have been very plausible. Certain difficulties, indeed, would still have occurred : for it might well seem strange, that with all their enmity and all their opportunities, the Jews and the Pagans should never once have detected the fraud ; that not a single confederate, either through fickleness, or disgust, or penitence, or the fear of death, should have made a confession ; and, most especially (an argument which I have already insisted upon,) that Judas, when he sold and betrayed his Lord, should not have fully exposed to the irritated Jewish rulers, the whole of this nefarious imposture. Yet, notwithstanding such difficulties, the objection would have been plausible, and might even upon a well-disposed mind, have left a very unpleasant impression.\* But the fact is, that miracles were

\* This objection is well answered by Bp. Douglas, even on its broadest basis : I, on the contrary, show, that certain miracles were wrought, in which the mechanism of confederacy was physically impossible ; and from their performance I would argue, that the other recorded miracles were real miracles also : for it is absurd to imagine, that he who could work real miracles, would sometimes resort to collusion for the purpose of producing false miracles. " Miracles, the offspring of imposture, can never have any chance to gain credit, or to pass undetected, in the time or at the place where they are pretended to be wrought,



wrought, which, from their special nature, exclude all possibility either of deception or collusion: and the argument from them is plainly this. If certain miracles were performed, which cannot be accounted for save by the direct intervention of heaven, he, who performed them, must have been a true prophet: but, if he were a true prophet, then all his other miracles, which we might haply have accounted for on the score of collusion, must have been genuine miracles; for it is at once absurd and superfluous to imagine, that he, who in some cases was empowered to work real miracles, should in other cases descend to a base, and in fact an unnecessary collusion.

The miracles, which I shall select to exemplify this position,

unless there is a strong confederacy on foot, privy to the imposture, and engaged to carry it on: and this has been generally the case of the most noted pretensions of Popery. But we have the fullest assurance that can possibly be had, that there was not any such confederacy on foot to propagate the miracles of Jesus. Had Christianity indeed been a religion already established in the world, when these miracles were pretended to; and had it been previously believed by those who believed the miracles: a combination to deceive the public might have been possible; and the very possibility of such a combination would justly have excited suspicions of its being real. But, when we reflect from what beginnings Christianity arose, and in what manner it made its entrance into the world; that Jesus, the great Founder of it, had not one follower when he set up his claim, and that it was his miracles which gave birth to his sect, and not the sect already established that appealed to his miracles: from these circumstances we may conclude unexceptionably, that there could not possibly be a confederacy strong enough to obstruct an examination of the facts, and to obtrude a history of lies upon the public. But why need I insist upon this, when I can urge further, that even though there had been a confederacy among the witnesses of the Gospel miracles, this could not have screened them from detection; as the persons who had all the means of inquiry in their hands, were engaged in interest to exert themselves on the occasion, nay, actually did put their power in execution against the reporters of these miracles? Forged miracles may pass current, where power and authority screen them from the too nice inquiry of examiners. But, whenever it shall happen that those who are vested with the supreme power are bent upon opposing and detecting them; the progress which they make can be but small, before the imposture is discovered, and sinks into obscurity and contempt. If this observation be well founded, as I am confident it is; that lying wonders should pass undetected among the Papists, will not be thought strange: for such stories among them have generally been countenanced, if not invented by those with whom alone the power of detecting the imposture and of punishing the impostors was lodged. Now the miracles of Jesus, it is notorious, were not thus sheltered—That there was no imposture detected, therefore, could not be owing to want of proper examination.” *Criterion*. p. 302—305.



are, the feeding of multitudes with food wholly inadequate to their numbers, and the sudden acquisition of various languages by men who were previously altogether illiterate.

On two several occasions, each time in the neighbourhood of the lake of Tiberias, did Christ perform the first of these miracles. First, he fed five thousand men, besides women and children, with five loaves and two fishes: and, when the whole multitude had eaten to satiety, there remained of the fragments twelve baskets full.\* Next, he fed four thousand men, besides women and children, with seven loaves and a few little fishes: and on this occasion, seven baskets full were left of the broken meat, when all had eaten and had been satisfied.†

Here, I maintain, there was no room either for collusion or deception. Two vast multitudes of both sexes and all ages, accidentally collected together, could not all have been confederates: and, as for any collusion on the part of the disciples alone, the thing was palpably impossible. Food, naturally sufficient for five thousand *men* only, *women* and *children* being excluded, at the rate of a pound weight to each man, would considerably exceed two tons. To convey this food to the place, where the multitude was assembled, would at the least require two stout carts. But these carts could not be brought unseen to the place of meeting: and, if the people had merely seen the disciples serving them with food from the carts (which they clearly must have done, had such an action ever really taken place;) nothing could have persuaded them, that a miracle had been wrought, and that they had all been fed from only five loaves and two fishes which some one happened to have brought with him in a wallet. Collusion, therefore, in the present instance, is manifestly impossible. Equally impossible also is deception. No sleight of hand, no dexterity of juggling, could convince a fasting multitude, that they had all eaten and were satisfied. Hunger would be too potent for imposture. Not a single man, woman, or child, would be persuaded that they had eaten a hearty meal, if, all the while, they had received no sustenance.

The same remark applies to the sudden acquisition of languages by the apostles, on the day of Pentecost. They had assembled together, it seems, with one accord, in one place: when there came a sound from heaven, as of a mighty rushing wind; and cloven tongues, like as of fire, sat upon each of them. The consequence was, that they were instantane-

\* Matt. xiv. 13—22.

† Matt. xv. 32—39.

ously endowed with the power of speaking languages which were previously unknown to them.\*

This was the miracle : and here again, as in the former case, there was no room either for collusion or deception. No juggling confederacy could enable men to speak suddenly a great variety of languages, with which they had previously been unacquainted : nor could any deception be practised upon those who heard them speak. Jews and proselytes, from many different parts of the world, were then assembled at Jerusalem ; to each of whom was obviously familiar the language of the country, where he ordinarily resided. When a man addressed them, they would severally know whether he spoke in their native tongue or not. A Roman Jew or proselyte could not be ignorant, whether what he heard was Latin : nor could any argument convince a Cretan Jew or proselyte, that an apostle, though speaking his native Syriac, was yet all the while uttering Greek. Deception was plainly quite out of the question. A Phrygian Jew might rashly fancy, that the men were full of new wine, and were mere unintelligible babblers, so long as he heard any of them addressing the Roman strangers in Latin ; and the same opinion might be hastily taken up by a Cretan Jew, if listening to an apostle as he spoke to a Mede or an Elamite in their respective tongues. But, when each heard himself addressed "in his own language by this apostle, or by that apostle ; he could have no doubt as to the language which was employed. He must know whether he heard his own tongue, or whether he did not hear it. However the faculty might have been attained, he could not but see that it was actually possessed. The fact, presented to the general attention of all Jerusalem, was this. Twelve illiterate Jews, most of them Galilean fishermen, unacquainted with any language but their own, are suddenly enabled to address the various strangers then assembled at the feast of Pentecost, each in his own national dialect. That any trick should have been practised is impossible ; that any groundless pretence should have been made, is equally impossible. The strangers understand them ; and declare, that they severally hear themselves addressed in their own languages : yet it is notorious, that these Galileans but yesterday knew no tongue, save the Hebrew-Syriac. How is the fact to be accounted for ? Magic, we know, was the ordinary solution of such difficulties on the part of the Jews and the Pagans : for, as to miraculous facts, they denied not their occurrence. But it

\* Acts ii, 1—4.

will be doubted in the present day, whether magic could enable an ignorant Galilean suddenly to speak Greek and Latin. Admit only the reality of the occurrence, and its proper miraculousness follows as a thing of course. The matter plainly cannot be accounted for without a miracle. Now, for the reality of the occurrence, both the Jews and the Pagans are our vouchers: nor is this all; in truth the history cannot proceed without it. We find these ignorant Galileans travelling to various parts of the world, both within and without the Roman empire. Wherever they go, without the least difficulty or hesitation, they address the natives in their own languages. The natives understand them: and, through their preaching, Christianity spreads in every direction with astonishing rapidity.\* How could this be, if the men knew no tongue save the Syriac? Or, if they knew various other tongues, how did they acquire their knowledge? How came John, and James, and Peter, and Jude to write in Greek, when we are quite sure that originally they could have been acquainted only with a dialect of Hebrew? To deny the miracle involves greater difficulties than to admit it: to believe, that ignorant Galilean fishermen could preach successfully to foreigners, evinces more credulity than to believe, that they were miraculously enabled to do what we positively know they must have done.

\* According to the fathers and early ecclesiastical historians, Andrew preached the Gospel in Scythia, Greece, and Epirus; Bartholomew in India, Arabia Felix, and Persia; Lebbeus, or Jude, in Lybia and Edessa; and Thomas, in India and Asiatic Ethiopia. Euseb. Eccles. Hist. lib. iii. c. 1. Theodoret. in Psalm cxvi. Nazian. Orat. 25. Hieron. Epist. 148. Euseb. Eccles. Hist. lib. v. c. 10, 11. Hieron. de viris illust. c. 36. Paulin. carm. 26. Hieron. in Matt. x. 4. Nazian. Orat. 25. Hieron. Epist. 148. Ambros. in Psalm. xlv. Chrysost. vol. vi. Append. Homil. 31. For these references I am indebted to Calmet. John presided as a metropolitan in the lesser Asia: and Peter, after governing the church of Antioch, is said to have been the first bishop of Rome.



## SECTION VII.

### THE DIFFICULTIES ATTENDANT UPON DEISTICAL INFIDELITY IN REGARD TO THE INTERNAL EVIDENCE OF CHRISTIANITY.

DIFFICULTIES, however, attend upon deistical Infidelity, not only in regard to the external evidence of Christianity, but also in regard to its internal evidence. This part of the subject is not a little interesting : because it distinctly shows, that truth is even constitutionally and essentially inherent in the Gospel ; being interwoven into its very texture, and forming in the very nature of things an inseparably component part of it.

Into a topic, thus copious, it is not my intention fully to enter : I rather purpose, agreeably to the plan which has been generally adopted throughout this discussion, to select and enlarge upon some of the principal and most striking particulars. As a specimen of such a mode of reasoning, I shall content myself with noticing two of these particulars : *the character of Christ, and the spirit of his religion.*

I. The pride and the ambition, inherent in man, lead him always to admire and affect the grand, the magnificent, the brilliant, the powerful, the daring, the energetic, the successful. He loves that which strikes forcibly upon the senses and the imagination : he delights in that which vehemently arrests his attention, which produces a strong theatrical effect, which wears the semblance of something splendid and heroic. The milder virtues he is apt to slight and pass over with a certain sensation of contempt : his favourite characters are the warrior, the legislator, the statesman. To these he looks up with complacent veneration : their actions are his most agreeable themes : and they themselves are his models of the sublime, the noble, the excellent, the illustrious. In paying homage to persons of such a description, he feels a sort of self-elevation : because his admiration of them is in effect an admiration of our common nature, as exhibited under what he deems its most perfect and most commanding aspect.

1. This humour we invariably find developed in works of



imagination, whether they be poems, or dramas, or romances.\* The hero both of the author and of the reader is marked by courage, by activity, by address, by eloquence, by splendid talents, by an easy generosity, by a lofty magnanimity. Difficulties he may encounter; but these he bravely surmounts: hardships he may endure; but these he gaily faces. Graceful and spirited, he conciliates love, and ensures admiration.

Such brilliant dreams are too fascinating to be lightly relinquished. From the transactions of common or fictitious life, they are readily transferred to religion: and demi-gods and prophets are invested with the attributes which have previously most gratified the imagination. Hence originated the characters of the Grecian Hercules, and Perseus, and Bacchus, and Jason. Hence the Egyptian Osiris was a successful warrior and a beneficent legislator. Hence the Indian Parasurama descended from heaven, to vanquish and extirpate, in twenty pitched battles, the impious children of the Sun; to consecrate a due proportion of their wealth to the Deity; to distribute the remainder, with open hand, among the poor; to establish a new dynasty of just and beneficent sovereigns; and then, content with his successful labours, to withdraw into dignified retirement amidst the deep recesses of the Gaut mountains.† Hence the Persian Rustam, mounted on his charger Rakesh, dared the shortest and most dangerous road to the haunted passes of Mazenderaun; surmounted all the multiplied perils of the seven stages; fought and slew the Deeve Sefeed; and restored the enthralled Cai-Caus to light and liberty.‡

The predominance of these notions produced the effect, which might naturally be anticipated. He, who wished to be received as a messenger from heaven, assumed the character which he previously knew could not fail of gaining extensive popularity and unbounded veneration. Thus the warlike son of Fridulph, the leader of the Scandinavian Ascæ into Europe from the wilds of Asiatic Scythia, with ready and successful

\* ——— Honoratum si forte reponis Achillen;  
Impiger, iracundus, inexorabilis, acer,  
Jura neget sibi nata, nihil non arroget armis.

Horat. de art. poet. ver. 120—122.

† Maurice's Anc. Hist. of Hind. vol. ii. p. 91—103. Similar remarks may be applied also to the character of Ram-Chandra. Ibid. p. 231—253.

‡ Orient. Collect. vol. i. p. 359—368. vol. ii. p. 45—55. The narrative characteristically ends as follows: "Then Rustam, the dispenser of kingdoms, the hero of the world, having received from Caus a splendid dress and other magnificent presents, returned to Zablestan.

policy adopted the name and character of the war-god Odin ; became at once the prophet, and sovereign, and lawgiver, and deity of his people ; subdued every nation which he encountered in his progress ; established his sons as princes and demi-gods ; and finally, preferring the death of a warrior to a lingering disease, inflicted upon himself voluntary wounds, and announced, when expiring, that he was returning into Scythia to take his seat among the other gods at an eternal banquet, where he would honourably receive all who should intrepidly expose themselves in battle, and die bravely with their swords in their hands.\* Thus the prophet of Arabia appeared as a warrior, and a lawgiver, and a statesman, whose courage might ensure success and admiration, and whose success might be urged as a certain proof of his divine commission. Thus, too, as I have already had occasion to notice, the impostor Coziba, when under the title of *Bar-Cochab*, he claimed to be the promised Messiah, sought to recommend himself to his countrymen, by his courage and enterprising spirit, by the assumption of the regal diadem, and by a promise of victory and liberation from the Roman sovereignty. Do we ask, why he selected for his model the character of a temporal prince and an intrepid warrior : the answer is obvious. The Jews, under the influence of a sentiment common to every age and to every nation, had framed to themselves an imaginary Messiah, with attributes nearly similar to those of Hercules, and Rama, and Odin, and Rustam. Under his banner, they were to go forth to victory : he was to be a mighty prince, an irresistible conqueror : every enemy was to fall before his feet : the whole world was to be modelled anew by him : and, in the political and moral arrangement which was to characterize the reign of this universal monarch, the favoured Jews, the chosen people of Jehovah, were to become both temporally and spiritually the undisputed head of the nations.

2. In each respect the very opposite to the fancied Messiah of the house of Judah, in all characteristic points the precise reverse of Odin, and Mohammed, and Rama, and Hercules,

\* Mallet's Northern Antiquit. vol. i. chap. 4. The sentiment which I am attempting to illustrate, is strongly exemplified in the conduct of one of the subjugated monarchs. "Odin," says Mr. Mallet, "afterwards passed into Sweden, where at that time reigned a prince named Gylfe : who, persuaded that the author of a new worship consecrated by conquests so brilliant, could not be of the ordinary race of mortals, paid him great honours, and even worshipped him as a divinity. By favour of this opinion, which the ignorance of that age led men easily to embrace, Odin quickly acquired in Sweden the same authority which he had obtained in Denmark."

was the meek and lowly prophet of Nazareth. Victory indeed he promised to his disciples ; but it was a victory over themselves, over their unruly lusts and passions, over their pride, and avarice, and selfishness, and ambition. Conquest he promised to his followers ; but it was a conquest of the mind, not of the body ; a conquest, by which all nations should be spiritually subjugated in the day of his power. Arms, potent and well-tempered, he placed in the hands of his soldiers : but *the weapons of their warfare* (as the apostle speaks) *were not carnal, though mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds, casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.\** With respect to principles, instead of a haughty, daring, active, enterprising spirit ; he recommended meekness, humility, mercy, peacefulness : instead of a temper, quick to resent insults and prone to avenge injuries ; he inculcated a mild tolerance of indignities, insomuch that (proverbially speaking,) whosoever should smite one of his followers on the right cheek, he should turn to him the left also : and, instead of that license which a warrior freely concedes to a warrior ; he urged the need of the most accurate purity, not only in action, but even in thought. Despised himself and rejected of men, on account of his inculcation of a philosophy so abhorrent from all their cherished partialities and prejudices, he taught his disciples, that, preaching his doctrines, they must expect the same reception from the world. Temporal things, such as dignity, riches, luxury, and honours, he utterly undervalued : eternal things, such as the love of God, happiness in a future world, and ultimate perfect holiness, he exclusively proposed to his followers. He promised them heaven, not, like Odin and Mohammed, as a reward for fighting bravely in his cause, and for gloriously dying upon the blood-stained battle-field ; but as the prize which would be awarded only to purity and humility, to holiness and self-denial. To obtain the palm, a mere outward demonstration of fiery zeal in his service was not sufficient. “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven : but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.”† What that will is, he explicitly set forth in terms which could not be misapprehended, though they would tend little to secure general popularity. “Whosoever shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least

\* 2 Cor. x. 4, 5.

† Matt. vii. 21.



in the kingdom of heaven : but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say unto you, that except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.”\*

3. Such was the character assumed by Christ, when he claimed to be the Messiah of the Jews. Its worldly impolicy I have already considered :† with that I am not at present concerned. I am now viewing it abstractedly and internally : I am placing it on the grounds of its own distinctness and peculiarity, in contrast with the characters of acknowledged impostors.

The brilliant success of Odin, or of Mohammed, may forcibly strike upon the imagination : but the very means which they took to promote their respective objects, tend immediately, in an age of cautious investigation, to induce more than a suspicion, that they were bold and interested adventurers. Internal evidence makes against their pretensions : abstractedly, we see much to dazzle, and attract, and chime in with the passions of mankind ; but we see nothing which might rationally lead us to believe that they were prophets sent from heaven.

Now, just as strongly as internal evidence tells against *their* pretensions ; so, by the rule of opposites, must it tell with equal strength in favour of the pretensions of *Christ*. For, as their character forms the very basis of the internal evidence against them ; so a character, diametrically the reverse, must needs form the basis of the internal evidence in favour of the person who sustains that character. Whence it clearly follows, that the stronger the internal evidence is against the former ; just in the same proportion must it be stronger in favour of the latter. In truth, it is impossible to study the character of Christ on the one hand, and of Odin, or Mohammed, or Coziba on the other hand, without feeling the weight and value of this particular sort of evidence. A religion which falls in with all the evil passions of mankind, which coincides with their worldly and ambitious speculations, and which exhibits its author as aiming at power and self-aggrandizement through the medium of warlike courage and activity, may dazzle the eyes of the ambitious, or the thoughtless : but a religion, which directly opposes the corrupt appetites of our species, which strikes at the root of pride, and selfishness, and greediness, which has a direct tendency to meliorate our hearts

\* Matt. v. 19, 20.

† See above Sect. v. § II. 1.



and dispositions, which inculcates all the milder and more useful virtues, which enjoins kindness, and benevolence, and purity, and harmony, which calls us away from the fleeting things of time, to God and holiness, as the only real chief good, and which exhibits its author as despising worldly riches and grandeur, and as intent only upon the moral improvement of the human race, in order to their qualification for happiness in a future state of existence ; a religion thus characterized (and such is the religion of Christ,) instinctively approves itself to every well regulated mind, as evinced by internal evidence to be indeed a religion worthy of, and proceeding from the pure and beneficent Creator of the universe. To believe at once with the infidel, though from directly conflicting evidence, that Odin, and Coziba, and Mohammed, and Christ are alike impostors, argues as much want of clear reasoning, as it does abundance of blind credulity.

II. I have been led, in some measure, to anticipate the second particular which I purposed to notice ; *the spirit and genius of the Christian religion* : it is needless for me to remark further on its purity and its benignity, its heavenly-mindedness and its divine charity : the character of its author could not be adequately discussed, if these topics were omitted. Avoiding, therefore, needless repetition, I shall consider Christianity, in contrast with allowed impostures, only so far as regards its honesty and its disinterestedness.

1. It is, I believe, the invariable characteristic of false religions, that, on the one hand, they seek to gain votaries by dishonest indulgence, or by unhallowed promises ; while on the other hand, they too plainly shew their interested origin by conferring special privileges or advantages upon their founders, or sacerdotal upholders.

(1.) In their love of war, and rapine, and conquest, the northern impostor Odin freely indulged his military followers : and thus at once gratified their favourite passion of enterprize, and employed it as the successful medium of his own aggrandizement. Courage and fortitude were sanctified, and therefore heightened by religion. The god, whose name he assumed, and of whom (according to the prevalent superstition of his native Asia) he apparently claimed to be an *avatar*, or descent, or incarnation : this god is *the severe and terrible god ; the father of slaughter ; the god that carrieth desolation and fire ; the active and roaring deity ; he who giveth victory, and reviveth courage in the conflict ; he who nameth those that are to be slain.\** From the character of the people was drawn

\* Mallet's North. Ant. vol. i. p. 86, 87.

the character of the god; and the impostor, who assumed his name, faithfully copied his attributes. The warriors, who went to battle, made a vow to send him a certain number of souls, which they consecrated to him. These souls were Odin's right: and he received them into his celestial palace of Valhalla, where he rewarded all such as died fighting sword in hand. There it was, that he distributed to them honour and felicity: there it was, that he received them to his own table, and welcomed them to an eternal banquet. Oft, in the heat of battle, did he descend, to intermix himself in the conflict, to inflame the fury of the combatants, to strike those who were destined to perish, and to carry the souls of the brave to his heavenly abode.\*

(2.) If, in the Scandinavian Paradise, the warriors of the north eternally combatted, and feasted, and drank mead out of the skulls of their enemies;† to those who should similarly die fighting in the cause of Mohammed and Islamism, were promised delights more accordant with the dispositions of persons born in the sultry clime of Arabia.

“For him, who dreadeth the tribunal of his Lord, are prepared two gardens, planted with shady trees. In each of them shall be two fountains flowing: in each of them shall there be of every fruit two kinds. They shall repose on couches, the linings whereof shall be of thick silk, interwoven with gold: and the fruit of the two gardens shall be near at hand, to gather. Therein shall receive them beauteous damsels, refraining their eyes from beholding any besides their spouses, having complexions like rubies and pearls. And, beside these, there shall be two other gardens of a dark green; in each of them shall be two fountains pouring forth plenty of water: in each of them shall be fruits, and palm-trees, and pomegranates. Therein shall be agreeable and beauteous damsels, having fine black eyes, and kept in pavilions from public view. Therein shall they delight themselves, lying on green cushions and beautiful carpets.‡”

Such, while luxuriating in Paradise, are the privileges of the true believers: and analogous to them are those, which, in the present world, the prophet grants to his followers, and yet more liberally to himself. In addition to the concubines of his Harem, each Mussulman is allowed to espouse four legitimate wives; but to Mohammed a greater license is freely permitted by the voice of inspiration.

\* Mallet's North. Ant. vol. i. p. 87.

† Ibid. p. 120.

‡ Koran, chap. 55.

“O prophet, we have allowed thee thy wives unto whom thou hast given their dower ; and also the slaves which thy right hand possesseth, of the booty which God hath granted thee ; and the daughters of thy uncle, and the daughters of thy aunts both on thy father’s side, and on thy mother’s side, who have fled with thee from Mecca ; and any other believing woman, if she gave herself unto the prophet, in case the prophet desireth to take her to wife. This is a peculiar privilege granted unto thee, above the rest of the true believers. We know what we have ordained them, concerning their wives and the slaves whom their right hands possess ; lest it should be deemed a crime in thee to make use of the privilege granted thee ; for God is gracious and merciful.”\*

While Mohammed thus bountifully made provision for the grosser appetites of himself and his followers ; he endeavoured to secure the firm establishment of his religion, by enjoining the adoption of military violence, and by exciting among his proselytes a spirit of fierce and relentless fanaticism.

“Go forth to battle, both light and heavy ; and employ your substance and your persons for the advancement of God’s religion. O prophet, wage war against the unbelievers and the hypocrites, and be severe unto them ; for their dwelling shall be hell ; an unhappy journey shall it be thither. O true believers, wage war against such of the infidels as are near you ; and let them find severity in you : and know that God is with those who fear him.† The sword is the key of heaven and of hell. A drop of blood shed in the cause of God, a night spent in arms, is of more avail than two months of fasting or prayer. Whosoever falls in battle, his sins are forgiven : at the day of judgment, his wounds shall be resplendent as vermillion and odoriferous as musk : and the loss of his limbs shall be supplied by the wings of angels and cherubim.”‡

(3.) The same evident traces of human contrivance and self-interested management, may be observed in the imposture of Alexander of Pontus, who flourished in the days of Lucian,

\* Koran, chap. 33. In this same chapter, Mohammed has somewhat ludicrously contrived to give his disciples a hint to avoid obtrusiveness, yet without violating the rules of Arabic good-breeding. “O true believers, enter not the houses of the prophet unless it be permitted you to eat meat with him, without waiting his convenient time : but when ye are invited, then enter. And when ye shall have eaten, disperse yourselves ; and stay not to enter into familiar discourse ; for this incommodeth the prophet. He is ashamed to bid you depart.”

† Koran, chap. 9.

‡ Koran, as abstracted by Gibbon. Hist. of the Decline. chap. 1. vol. ix. p. 297.



and whose machinations have been fully developed by that writer.

In the religion already established throughout Pontus, he made no alteration: his own system he only engrafted upon it. That he might the better ensure success, he laboured to engage in his cause the whole heathen priesthood, not only in Pontus, but in all other regions: and, in pursuance of this project, when devotees came to consult him, he often sent them to other pagan oracles, which at that time bore the highest reputation. Of every sect of philosophers he spoke with much respect, the Epicureans alone excepted; who, as he well knew, would from their principles deride and oppose his fraud. To conquer their resistance, as well as that of the Christians, he called in the aid of force and persecution; stirring up the people against them, and answering arguments with stones. That his own advantage might not be overlooked or forgotten, he delivered the following oracle in the name of his god. *I command you to grace with gifts my prophet and minister: for, though I regard not riches myself, I have the highest regard for my prophet.* The immense gains which he thus made, he shared with his associates and instruments, whom he employed in carrying on and supporting his imposture. When any persons, whom he dared not attack by open force, declared themselves to be his enemies, he strove to gain them by blandishments: and as soon as he got them into his power, he secretly destroyed them. Others he kept in a state of awe and dependence, by retaining in his own hands the written questions which they had proposed to his god respecting public affairs: and, as these persons were generally men of the greatest rank and power, their subserviency to him, thus basely acquired, proved of no little utility in the furtherance of his project. Lastly, in the event of a discovery, he secured to himself a retreat, by persuading, on the strength of an oracle, the Roman general Rutilianus to marry his daughter, whom he pretended to have been born to him from the moon. This alliance, accordingly, saved him from punishment: for the Roman governor of Bithynia and Pontus excused himself on that account from doing justice upon him, when Lucian and several other persons offered their services as his accusers.\*

(4.) Examples of a similar description might easily be produced to a considerable extent: but I shall content myself with

\* Lucian. Pseudomant. Varior. p. 762—782. cited by Lord Lyttelton.



noticing only a single very remarkable instance, in addition to those which have already been brought forward.

If we peruse the Institutes of Menu, and the Puranas of the Brahmenical priesthood, we shall distinctly perceive, that that extraordinary fabric, the old theology of Hindostan, which still subsists even in the present day, bears on the very face of it the evident marks of deliberate politico-sacerdotal imposture. The whole community, as was the case likewise in Egypt, and Britain, and many other ancient nations, is divided into castes or classes; of which the priesthood occupies the first rank, and the military nobility the second. These two powerful and co-operating classes keep in their own hands the whole authority of the state: and, while the multitude are condemned to a hopeless degradation, from which no talents, and no virtues, and no exertions can elevate them, the superiority of the Brahmens and the Cshatriyas, is jealously and most disproportionably guarded by the awful sanctions of religion.

“A twice-born man, who barely assaults a Brahmen with intention to hurt him, shall be whirled about for a century in hell. He, who through ignorance of the law, sheds blood from the body of a Brahmen, shall feel excessive pain in his future life: as many particles of dust as the blood shall roll up from the ground, for so many years shall the shedder of that blood be mangled by other animals in his next birth.\* Never shall a king slay a Brahmen, though convicted of all possible crimes. No greater crime is known on earth than slaying a Brahmen: the king therefore must not even form in his mind an idea of killing a priest.† A Brahmen, whether learned or ignorant, is a powerful divinity.‡ From his high birth alone, a Brahmen is an object of veneration even to deities.¶ For killing intentionally a virtuous man of the military class, the penance must be a fourth part of that ordained for killing a priest; for killing a Vaisya, only an eighth; for killing a Sudra, who had been constant in discharging his duties, a sixteenth part.§ For striking a Brahmen even with a blade of grass, or tying him by the neck with a cloth, or overpowering him in argument, and adding contemptuous words, the offender must soothe him by falling prostrate.¶¶ The corporeal frame of a king is composed of particles from the eight

\* Institutes of Menu. ch. iv. § 165—168.

† Ibid. ch. viii. § 380, 381.

‡ Ibid. ch. ix. § 317.

¶ Ibid. ch. xi. § 85.

§ Ibid. ch. xi. § 127.

¶¶ Ibid. ch. xi. § 206.

guardian deities of the world : he, consequently, surpasses all mortals in glory. Like the sun, he burns eyes and hearts ; nor can any human creature on earth even gaze on him. A king, even though a child, must not be treated lightly from an idea that he is a mere mortal : no, he is a powerful divinity, who appears in a human shape.\* Brahmins are declared to be the basis, and Cshatryas the summit, of the legal system.† The military class cannot prosper without the sacerdotal, nor can the sacerdotal be raised without the military : both classes, by cordial union, are exalted in this world and in the next.‡

2. It is easy to read the characteristics of these various modifications of imposture : they constitute the safe internal evidence, by which a system of interested deception may be traced, and detected, and known. No such characteristics, however, mark the Christian religion as developed and set forth in the written word of the New Covenant. Honesty and disinterestedness shine conspicuously throughout the entire code. We can discover no base pandering to the evil lusts and passions of our degenerate species ; no artful contrivance, by which religion may be turned into gain, by which a false prophet may acquire sovereignty and dominion, by which a venal priesthood may heap up to itself riches, and honours, and privileges. Lust and murder, persecution and rapine, are not allowed, and justified, and sanctified under the name of religion. No compromise is made with unholiness : no bartering is visible between profligacy and ritual observances. The rule is absolute, unbending, universal.

“Walk in the Spirit ; and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these : adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like ; of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance : against such there is no law. And they that are Christ’s, have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.|| Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children : and walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath

\* Ibid. ch. v. § 96. ch. vii. § 4—7.

† Ibid. ch. xi. § 84.

‡ Ibid. ch. ix. § 322.

|| Galat. v. 16, 19—25.

given himself for us, an offering and sacrifice to God, for a sweet-smelling savour. But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints ; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient, but rather giving of thanks. For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man who is an idolator, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no man deceive you with vain words : for, because of these things, cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience. Be not ye therefore partakers with them. And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them. For it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret.”\*

Such is the Christian rule of action : and in strict accordance with it is the disinterestedness of the Gospel.

Let the canonical books of the New Dispensation be examined with the most scrupulous accuracy ; and nothing can be detected which may excite the most distant suspicion that either Christ or his apostles sought their own temporal advantage or aggrandizement. If, at a subsequent period, evil men, their successors, have dishonestly taught, that to give largely to the Church is the most certain mode of expiating sins, and of acquiring favour with God ; if a towering edifice of gainful superstition and worldly domination, has been erected upon the *personal* declaration to Peter, that he should be the rock upon which Christ would build his Church, whether composed of Jews or of Gentiles (a declaration accomplished in the remarkable circumstance, that by this honoured apostle the first-fruits of each denomination were introduced into the communion of the faith :)† if such deeds have at any time disgraced the followers of the lowly Jesus, they cannot impeach the unsullied integrity of his religion itself. Paul foretold, that, after his departure, grievous wolves should enter in among his spiritual children, not sparing the flock :‡ and it were a strange mode of reasoning to argue backward, to the worldly and self-aggrandizing character of Christianity, from the predicted and strongly reprobated secularity of a future generation. Would we judge of the spirit of the Gospel, we must turn to the written word. Christianity must be allowed to speak for herself, not in the actions of a degenerate priesthood, but from her

\* Ephes. v. 1—12.

† Matt. xvi. 18, 19. Acts ii. 14—41. Acts x. See Bp. Horsley's Sermon on Matt. xvi. 18, 19. in Sermons, vol. i. p. 305.

‡ Acts xx. 29.

own authenticated documents. The Gospel must be studied in the Gospel.

3. What then is the result of the preceding comparison, which has been instituted, between Christianity, on the one hand, and certain acknowledged impostures on the other hand? The result is this.

If the characteristics of those impostures form the internal evidence that they are indeed nothing better than base and interested fabrications; then the characteristics of Christianity, being of a directly opposite description, must needs form a strong internal evidence, that it is in truth a religion sent down from God: and, by parity of reasoning, the more forcibly one set of characteristics evince imposture; the more forcibly also must the other set of characteristics evince genuineness. For direct opposites cannot bring out the same conclusion. Whence, if the characteristics of Paganism and Mohammedism bring out the conclusion of fraud, the opposite characteristics of Christianity cannot but bring out the opposite conclusion of truth. The infidel, however, has persuaded himself, that direct opposites may bring out the same conclusion; for he deems Paganism, Mohammedism, and Christianity, to be alike impostures. Can he be acquitted of illogical reasoning and blind credulity?



## SECTION VIII.

### RECAPITULATION AND CONCLUSION.

BEFORE the present discussion is finally closed, it may be useful briefly to recapitulate the several difficulties with which deistical Infidelity has been found to be encumbered.

I. The difficulties in question are as follows :

1. The grounds and reasons of Infidelity, when fairly examined in six several points, involve such an extraordinary mass of contradictions, that in truth it is more easy to admit than to deny the existence of a divine revelation. For a revelation from heaven, is neither, in the nature of things, abstractedly impossible ; nor is it so improbable an occurrence as to beggar all credibility ; nor are the evidences for such a revelation so weak and unsatisfactory, that they are insufficient to command our reasonable assent ; nor are the objections and difficulties such, that they cannot be removed ; nor is there any solid foundation for the crude fancy, that, because *some* theological systems are acknowledged impostures, therefore *every* theological system is a mere human fabrication ; nor yet is our unassisted reason so potent, as to exclude the very necessity of a divine revelation. On none of these points are the arguments of Infidelity conclusive and satisfactory : on the contrary, they are vague, illogical, and insufficient.\*

2. Infidelity, when not degraded into absolute brutish atheism, specially claims to itself the appellation of *Deism*. Yet without the aid of revelation, we cannot clearly demonstrate, or certainly know, even so much as that there is no more than one God : and if, for the sake of argument, the unity of the Godhead be conceded to the infidel, he will still be unable positively to develope and firmly to establish the moral attributes of the Deity. But, to suppose that an infinitely wise Being (for the wisdom and power of God may be proved by unassisted reason, though his moral attributes cannot be similarly demonstrated) would create a race of intelligent agents, and then turn them loose into the wide world without giving them the slightest hint as to his will or their duties, is a notion so

\* See above Sect. i.

flatly contradictory to every idea which we can form of the Supreme Reason, that it may justly be said to beggar all credibility.\*

3. Insurmountable difficulties, moreover, repeatedly attend upon Infidelity in regard to historical matters of fact. An important specimen of this mode of reasoning is afforded by the fact of *the universal deluge*. This fact, of necessity, involves such consequences, that the infidel must either in the face of all testimony deny the fact itself, or he must admit that a divine revelation has actually taken place.†

4. Nor do less difficulties attend upon Infidelity in regard to accomplished prophecy. As a specimen of the argument from prophecy, the present state of the Jews may be aptly selected. The high antiquity of the prediction respecting them, delivered by Moses, cannot be controverted: and its exact accomplishment in the condition of the house of Judah, is a naked matter of fact, which can neither be denied nor evaded. Now the denial that a prophecy, thus minutely fulfilled and still fulfilling, must have proceeded from the inspiration of God, involves a gross absurdity: and the acknowledgment, that such a prophecy did indeed proceed from the inspiration of God, inevitably draws after it the additional acknowledgment that the Law of Moses was a divine revelation.‡

5. Difficulties increase upon Infidelity, as the facts, and circumstances, and character of the Christian Dispensation are considered. These are such and so strongly marked, that to deem Christ and his early disciples enthusiasts or impostors, requires a more vehement effort of belief than to deem them the inspired messengers of heaven.||

6. Similar difficulties occur, on the infidel hypothesis, in regard to the rapid propagation of Christianity, and the evidence by which the performance of miracles is supported. The deist, after every effort has been made, unphilosophically contends for the existence of effects without any adequate cause: and is content simply and gratuitously to deny alleged facts, which rest on the unbroken testimony, not merely of friends, but also of acute and inveterate enemies.§

7. Lastly, the infidel is still impeded by the most perplexing difficulties, if from the external he directs his attention to the internal evidence of Christianity. In the case of all acknowledged impostures, their leading characteristics constitute that

\* See above Sect. ii.

† See above Sect. iii.

‡ See above Sect. iv.

|| See above Sect. v.

§ See above Sect. vi.

very internal evidence, by which they are the most strongly and indubitably evinced to *be* impostures. But the leading characteristics of Christianity, in respect both of its author and of itself, are the precise opposites of the leading characteristics of all false religions. Therefore, by the rule of contraries, if the leading characteristics of false religions demonstrate their falsehood; the leading characteristics of Christianity must demonstrate its truth. Unless this be admitted, we maintain in effect, that directly opposite premises may bring out precisely the same conclusions. To such a position the theory of the infidel will be found inevitably to conduct him. Let him disguise his reasoning as he may, it truly and ultimately amounts to this: that two men and two religious systems, though respectively marked by characteristics in all points diametrically opposite to each other, are yet to be viewed as mutually possessing precisely the same character.\*

II. These are some of the numerous difficulties, which encumber the theory of the infidel; difficulties, from which he can never extricate himself, because they are essentially inherent in the hypothesis which he has most unhappily and most illogically been induced to adopt. They have now been and discussed at considerable length, and (it is hoped) with fairness and impartiality. On a careful review of whole argument, the cautious reader must judge for himself whether, after all the captious objections which have at various times been started by infidel writers, the disbelief of Christianity does not involve a higher degree of credulity than the belief of it; whether, in point of rationality, it be not more difficult to pronounce it an imposture, than to admit it as a revelation from heaven.

\* See above Sect. vii.

THE END.

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